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Factors Which May Contribute to the Marginal Status of Art Education in Chile

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The status of art in the Chilean school curriculum is examined in relation to attitudes toward art, toward education, and toward art education. The weakening of the position of art in school curricula is tied to the political impact of a military regime. A technological ethos, and an historically narrow and vulnerable conception of art in education are also seen as detrimental.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to throw some light on the main factors which may help to explain the marginal position of art in the Chilean school curriculum.¹ Bearing in mind that various elements contribute to the status of art in schools, this study considers three main ideas: attitudes toward art, attitudes toward education, and attitudes toward art education.

This paper represents a personal perspective and makes no claim to objectivity or to generalize. This exploration is based on my experience as an art teacher in schools through contact and interchange of ideas with children, teachers, educational authorities, and parents, as well as study and readings at the university level. Therefore, although there may be other factors affecting the status of art in education, the three issues stated are considered most relevant for the purposes of this study; that is, a personal, reflective view of the marginal position of art in Chilean schools.

This paper outlines the three chosen issues for methodological reasons. Some of these factors are closely related, and they should not be considered as separate issues. Rather, they constitute an organic whole.

Attitudes Toward Art

Art Perceived as Politically and Morally Subversive

The politically central function of art is well documented. The destruction of politically volatile works of art and persecution of twentieth-century artists are also well documented. However, art also serves official political regimes. These systems may establish control over dissident artists and prepare new aesthetic standards to support and propagate the official political ideology.

Repressive regimes may attempt to abolish artistic autonomy. Because schools are social institutions in which the function of art may be either critical or supportive, there may be official requirements to orient art education according to specified ideological conventions. This intervention, usually implemented by educational authorities, may be carried out in different ways. For example, they may emphasize the teaching of those areas of the art syllabus which may serve the official ideology, remove those teachers who are suspected of having contrary ideas to the regime, or change the curriculum plan so

¹ Evidence of the marginal position of art in the Chilean school curriculum is provided in Chapter II of *The Need for Art in Education with Special Reference to the Curriculum in Chile Examined both from a Historical and Contemporary View*. Errázuriz, L., (1989). Ph.D. thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

that art can become an optional subject or simply be eliminated from the school curriculum.

The critical function of art education is rarely recognized openly by authorities or parents. I am inclined to believe that in Chile it is not merely a coincidence that art became optional and was banned in some courses of the school curriculum under the military regime.² The decision to weaken the position of art in the curriculum was probably due not only to political considerations, but also to other factors described in this study.

Chile's democratic history is the longest in the whole of South America. However, it was interrupted in 1973 by a military regime. Prior to 1973, art was considered to be a compulsory subject of the curriculum and therefore enjoyed a better status in schools than it does today.

The teaching of art may be considered to be a threat because of the political implications of its critical function. There are also a variety of other reasons, among which the moral dimension seems to be very significant. From the beginning of the history of art education in Chile, "moral education" was closely associated with the teaching of art, partly because it was believed that the practice of geometrical line drawing would encourage children to have a sense of cleanliness and at the same time help to discipline their behavior in schools. However, during this century art history and the aim of self-expression were introduced in the art curriculum, giving children the opportunity to appreciate works of art and express their feelings, emotions, and ideas more freely.³ As a consequence of this development, moral teaching through art, which in the past apparently had presented no problems, became more ambiguous and problematic. This was mainly because children had access to a broader concept of art, which introduced them to certain kinds of ideas and knowledge which caused concern among the educational authorities and parents. Maxine Greene describes this concern in the following terms:

The arts are, for many persons, mysteriously subversive. Those who know little about the arts may fear that contact with art or artists will have an unwholesome effect on people's lives. For all the protestations about the joys, the uplifting qualities to be found in the arts, there is some fear (usually inarticulate) that the arts may tap regions of darkness, ambiguity, and strange kinds of spontaneity in human beings. This anxiety, often deep-rooted, must be combatted in the schools.⁴

Finally, another factor which may add to the vision of art education as a threat is that art teachers are perceived in a different way by the school community. In fact, as Malcolm Ross has pointed out, among the most damaging characteristics of art teachers (who could be termed "stereotyped") is their eccentricity of dress and manner which could cause people to think that they are socially disruptive and morally ambivalent.⁵

Art Regarded Mainly for Artists and the Elite

² A new legislation from 1980 put the subject of fine art as optional for the last two courses of primary education, interrupting its compulsory position for the first time since 1860. The consequences of this legislation became worse in secondary education, where at present fine art is considered as an elective subject for the first level and has virtually disappeared from the second level.

³ The teaching of art history became part of the Syllabus for Secondary Schools for the first time in 1912. On the other hand, drawing as a means of expression began to be contemplated with significant purpose with the introduction of the Syllabus for Primary Education from 1931.

⁴ Greene, M. (1977). In *Coming to our senses. A Panel Report*. David Rockefeller, the American Council for the Arts in Education. University Graphics, Inc., pp. 52-53.

⁵ Ross, M. (1975). *Arts and the adolescent*. School Council Working Paper 54. Evans/Methuen Educational. Printed in Great Britain by Richard Clay, p. 42.

This view is based on the belief that art is essentially for those who have special talents, that is, it requires a mysterious capacity for producing works of art and a refined sensitivity in order to appreciate the artistic heritage.

The former attitude is, of course, closely related to the position given in contemporary society to art, which, according to Cross, may be thought of as:

1. a respectable and relaxing hobby,
2. a rather superior kind of interior decoration,
3. an opportunity for eccentric self-expression,
4. an excuse for adopting a freer lifestyle, or
5. the prestigious product of a special kind of person (the "genius") for the delectation and admiration of all of us.⁶

Perhaps if we consider some of the above ideas, it may be possible to throw light on why art is mainly regarded for artists and the elite. For instance, to regard art merely as a respectable and relaxing hobby gives one the impression that it is not actually considered to be a form of work. In a modern society, as Janet Wolff says, the potential similarity between art and work has been lost:

The idea of the artist as an individual creative worker, engaged in some supra-human special task, emerged from the period of the Renaissance. Before that time in Europe, what we refer to as artistic work was performed by people working much more under conditions of other types of worker, and painting, designing, and building as artisans and craftsmen, with collective commitment and shared responsibility.⁷

In an educational system seen mainly from the perspective of social and economic mobility, the opposition between art and work may influence the status of the subject in the curriculum, making its place marginal. This may be due to the fact that it is not regarded by the vast majority of people as a legitimate economic vocation.

In other respects, the notion of the artist seen as a very special kind of person ("a genius") who is often considered to be eccentric and quite different from the average person, has contributed to the social isolation of artists and artistic creations. The history of Chile is rich in examples of the social discontinuity between artists and works of art and the rest of the community. For instance, in 1928 Carlota Manheimeir wrote:

Some people say that children should not be encouraged while they are painting or scribbling, neither should they be given too much merit for what they do, as this attitude could lead children to believe that they could become artists in the future, without them having any aptitude for this kind of life.⁸

The following quotation refers to a working class woman who with others has produced patchwork since the military coup of 1973 in order to earn some money for their homes and to carry a message to other parts of the world against the regime. I hope that this example will illustrate to what extent art and artists are perceived as separate from ordinary everyday life in Chilean society.

Apart from all this, it's a great joy that people consider that we are making art, that we are artists in this. For us, as housewives, we've never been, or dreamt of being, artists or working in that sort of thing. In this there's some compensation for all

⁶ Cross, J. (1977). For art's sake? George Allen & Unwin. Great Britain, Biddles Ltd., Guildford, Surrey. p. 24.

⁷ Wolff, J. (1981). The social production of art. The Macmillan Press Ltd., London. p. 17.

⁸ Manheimeir, C. (1928). One hundred years of art education in Chile. V. I. pp. 188-189.

that's happened. It gives us more strength to go on, to go on struggling to live. God willing, we'll be able to make them better every day.⁹

This reveals the perceived isolation of the artist from society of creation. Consequently, we may ask, how do these ideas about art and artists affect the status of art in the school curriculum?

The consequences of the above conception are primarily negative. If interest in art is limited to a very small minority, there is no logical justification for teaching a subject in the curriculum. It will be regarded as beneficial to only a small group of children. Furthermore, this conception of art as mainly for artists would seem to imply that art can only be generated and experienced by those who have special talents. It may also imply that art cannot be taught, that is, one cannot learn to be an artist; artists are born with special gifts.

Art Seen as a Useless Activity in a Culture Dominated by a Technological Ethos

It would be difficult to deny that one of the most distinctive features of our present world is the high level of scientific and technological development achieved in contemporary society. This feature has progressively permeated many aspects of human experience and the environment in which we live. This scientific and technological ethos which is shaping every dimension of our contemporary society cannot be seen merely as a forecast as to how these changes will affect humankind in the long term. Melvin Rader, referring to the impact of science and technology on our civilization, has said:

Whether the changes on the whole will be good or bad hangs in the balance. No one will deny that there have been some improvements in human affairs, but the triple threat of the thermonuclear war, overpopulation, and ecological catastrophe is acute... aesthetically this is perhaps the most serious threat of all — the sweetness of nature, the very face of the land, is being glutted with ugliness and pollution.¹⁰

It is not clear either whether the changes will on the whole be good or bad for art education. What are the consequences of scientific and technological development for the status of art in schools? It is not easy to deal with this question, as the relationships between technology, art, and education are very far-reaching and complex. Hence, in an attempt to clarify this issue, I will focus on those points which could help to throw light on this question.

We have to begin with the recognition of the fact that the introduction of art in schools of many European and American countries was very much influenced by the needs of modern industry. This is one of the clearest reflections of the effects of the scientific and technological on art education. In this sense, the beginning of art education in Chile, and particularly its development during the first decades of the century, are closely related to industrial expansion. Consequently, this can be seen as a direct consequence of the impact of the scientific and technological ethos on Chilean society. Since the 1960s, there has been a growing tendency to put art in a marginal position in Chilean schools. It appears that the influence of scientific and technological development is negatively affecting the status of art education. That is one of the factors which is contributing to the marginal status of art in the education of children.

⁹ Brett, G. (1986). *Through our own eyes: Popular art and modern history*. Heretic book by GMP Publishers Ltd., London. p. 50.

¹⁰ Rader M., & Jessup, B. (1976). *Art and human values*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., p. 289.

Several factors may explain why Chilean art education during the last decades has suffered adverse effects due to technological and scientific development. It seems that at present the teaching of art is not considered to be a key area in contributing to industrial and economic progress of the country as it was understood in the past. In scientific and technological fields, the traditional uses of drawing have been replaced by new techniques in the processes of research and production. Because the teaching of art is not regarded as a relevant contribution to the economic progress of the nation, neither is it considered to be a necessary subject of the curriculum.

Scientific and technological developments have increased the level of specialization required in various areas of knowledge. The contemporary school curriculum also reflects this. For Chilean art education, the consequences of this specialization have, of course, been negative. During this century, schools, particularly in secondary education, have increased the number of hours allocated to scientific areas (math, biology, chemistry, and physics) to the detriment of other subjects such as art and music.

Perhaps the most significant influence of scientific rationality on the present status of art education in Chile, has been the growing tendency to introduce a utilitarian and materialistic attitude into the society, aimed toward the creation of a technical culture in which art may be regarded as futile, irrelevant, and therefore peripheral to the vast majority of people. Victor Heyfron described the impact of this mentality on the curriculum and art education in the following way:

In times of scarcity, when people's lives are dominated by the material concerns of earning a living, it is easy to view relevance in the curriculum as one of pragmatic instrumentality. In this kind of context art is typically considered a luxury and superfluous to the real business of living.¹¹

Some of the more typical opinions of secondary school children, who believe that art is a futile activity or a minor subject of the curriculum, are as follows:

Art is not useful and therefore it should not be taught. As it is not my intention to become an artist or to be involved in work connected with art in the future, I do not want to have the subject of art in the curriculum.¹²

This represents the view of many secondary school children that there is little sense, or no sense at all, in being taught a subject like art, as we are living in a scientific and technological world which mainly demands pragmatic and instrumental knowledge.

Attitudes Toward Education

Education Seen as Imparting Information and as Establishing Uniformity in Children

In this section, I shall attempt to describe in more depth those views and features of school education which may be considered to be adverse to the teaching of art.

If we observe what schools do and what schools are, we may come to the conclusion that these institutions are not the most suitable places in which to be taught art. The essential goal of the organization of contemporary educational systems and education in broader meanings of art in human experience may be seen as irreconcilable in the view of some art educators.

¹¹ Heyfron, V. (1981). The relevance of art in education. In *The Aesthetic Imperative*. Malcolm Ross, p. 130.

¹² Errázuriz, L. (1985). Attitudes of the school community towards art. In *Journal of the Chilean Society of Education Through Art*. Boletín N. 7, p. 21.

It would seem that schools, in many ways because of their historical background, make difficult the teaching of art. This is largely connected, in my opinion, to the fact that in Chile and probably in many other countries, modern schools emerged in order to develop a curriculum for mass education based on the teaching of language arts, math, science, and social studies. Art education, in the broader meaning of art in human experience, was not originally considered. In other words, schools were founded to develop an unbalanced curriculum. Schools were designed and built without considering the teaching of art and were mainly to provide instruction within an environment of discipline and conformity. It seems useful, therefore, to examine in some detail those attitudes embodied by schools in Chile, which seem to make work in art education difficult.

Schools: A World of Uniformity

Since during the 1960s and '70s a good deal of educational literature has been devoted to criticizing the schools' educational system (see, for instance, Holt, Illich, Freire), only a summary of the main ideas concerning the status of art in the curriculum will be considered in this section.

If we look at formal education, we realize that the transmission of knowledge rests upon 26 letters and 10 numerals. These are merely tools to use in the pursuit of knowledge, and are not in themselves learning. These 36 abstract figures are manipulated and reshuffled from kindergarten through college.¹³

On the other hand, since the main purpose of schools is to provide instruction and qualifications by teaching children those subjects in which the "36 abstract figures are manipulated," to be effective in achieving this purpose, the system as a whole is aimed toward this objective as if it were a factory or a regiment. Eisner has written:

Schools, especially large ones, tend to have the character of factories. The need to process and control the movement of a large number of students resulted in a mode of school organization and the development of attitudes that pay little attention to individual wants and needs.... Thus a system of controls is established in schools that oftentimes contradicts the very values of independence, critical thinking ability, and perceptivity that schools say they would like to develop in the young.¹⁴

However, it is not only the way in which schools organize the "transmission of knowledge" which affects the status of art in the curriculum. The nature of the school environment often embodies anti-aesthetic features. For example, it often consists of architecture lacking in sensitive design and color and devoid of trees, flowers, and gardens. Malcolm Ross has written, "The way the learning or living environment looks and feels is of the most immediate concern to the idea of aesthetic in education."¹⁵

This enumeration of problems could be extended, but it is not my intention to overemphasize the negative aspects of Chilean schools. These criticisms may be applied to schools in other countries.

Education Seen Mainly from the Perspective of Social and Economic Mobility

During the last decades, various educators have focused their attention on the social functions that schools fulfill in society. For instance, Eisner has written:

¹³ Lowenfeld, V. (1982). *Creative and mental growth*. 7th ed. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. Printed in the United States of America, p. 5-6.

¹⁴ Eisner, E. (1972). *Educating artistic vision*. Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. New York. p. 274.

¹⁵ Ross, M. (1984). *The aesthetic impulse*. Pergamon Press, London. p. 97.

Schools are looked upon by most citizens as places to be used to get ahead in the world. Schools are the ladders (whether in actuality or in belief) up which one moves to achieve success. Economic mobility and social mobility are largely influenced by how well one does in school and how far one goes.¹⁶

Yet, in Chile and probably many other countries too, when middle and upper class parents select schools for their children's education, they usually do not care at all whether or not the school has a good reputation in teaching art. What actually matters to them, almost obsessively, is the school academic level in mathematics, Spanish, and sometimes in foreign languages. I am not attempting here to make judgments about the criteria which parents use to choose schools for their children, because obviously they try to look for the best educational system according to their values, financial resources, and so forth.

As a result of the situation described above, the following attitudes toward art are very often manifested, directly or indirectly, by parents:

- Although they tend to recognize that art may contribute to the education of their children, particularly in primary school, parents have a clear tendency to undervalue the subject in comparison with other areas of the curriculum, mainly because it does not offer economic and social security.
- This inclination to neglect art is frequently transmitted to their children. For example, parents complain when children dedicate extramural time to work in art, because this means that they are spending less time on learning those subjects which are considered to be more important.

Consequently, children who feel a natural impulse to work on art during the first years of primary education are progressively inhibited in this area by social pressures from the family, school, mass media, and others.

Education Seen from a Narrow Conception of Knowledge

In the last point related to attitudes toward education, I wish to consider an issue which is of central importance and, according to several educators, may help to explain why art has a marginal status in the school curriculum.

It is believed that education is for intellectual development, while art is mainly concerned with feelings and emotions. Since feelings and emotions are not considered by many to be involved in intellectual development, art can only have a marginal status in schools.

This double misconception about the meaning of art and education, which was imported to South America from European countries, has been present within Chilean schools from the very beginning of their history. The creation of Chilean primary and secondary schools was mainly based on European educational models, which according to L. A. Reid have been largely identified with "discursive propositional forms of knowledge." Reid wrote:

In the long history of Western culture, and in our educational curricula, knowledge has been identified with its discursive propositional forms, and the curriculum not only has been hugely dominated by them, but dominated largely to the exclusion of non-discursive knowledge and understanding, implying a separation of thinking and feeling. This divisiveness is, on any liberal view of education as concerned with whole persons, disastrously destructive. It is destructive in that the capacities for

¹⁶ Eisner, E. (1976). *The arts, human development, and education*. Cutchan Publishing Corporation, Berkeley, CA: p. 220.

feeling and understanding required for the development of non-discursive awareness remain undeveloped and so wither and become atrophied.¹⁷

In order to better understand the misconception of knowledge currently adopted by schools and its influence on the status of art in the curriculum, it may be useful to examine in more depth why art has for a long time been considered a technical subject in Chilean primary and secondary education.

There is no simple answer. However, in my opinion, the fact that art was introduced in the curriculum as a skill in drawing, based on technical exercises and practiced for many years as such, has to a large extent determined the view of art as a "technical subject." On the other hand, although the art curriculum was extended to other areas such as modeling, painting, etc., the chief emphasis in the teaching of art has always been on activities which require practical work. Hence, within a school system mainly concentrating on theoretical instruction, it is not surprising that those few subjects which nearly always have been carried out through manual activities are seen as different from the rest of the curriculum. These technical areas are viewed as not requiring intellectual effort.

Art in schools tends to be identified with feelings and emotions and is chiefly regarded as a non-intellectual and subjective area. Consequently, it is seen as a subject which cannot be quantified through objective assessment. Yet, schools are urged more and more to give quantified accounts of what children do. Therefore, for the status of art in the curriculum, the combination of both factors is, of course, negative. Eisner has said the present trend in education is that "what is measurable is evaluated and what is evaluated is emphasized."¹⁸

Within the school community, there is a common misconception that art cannot be assessed. Consequently, the subject tends to be disregarded, devalued, and reduced to the status of a pastime. This is not difficult to explain. In my experience as an art teacher, one of the factors which children consider in order to discriminate between "important" and "non-important" subjects is the amount of work required by each area of the curriculum and its level of difficulty to pass examinations. In other words, hard work and arduous examination is usually thought of as "important," while a couple of hours per week of work which may be enjoyable and assessed in a relaxed environment suggests to children that this is "not important."

A school system may reduce the teaching of art to a mere technical and affective function because of its aim toward a limited conception of knowledge, and because it is increasingly dominated by the demand for accountability. In a system such as this, art can occupy only a marginal status.

Attitudes Toward Art Education

In this third section, I examine the relationship between the status of art in the curriculum and the way in which art is justified and taught in the schools.

It seems to me that the issues mentioned in "Attitudes Toward Art" and "Attitudes Toward Education" are perhaps the most relevant in order to understand why art has a marginal status. However, the points which will be considered in this section are also important. A holistic point of view is adapted to explicate this situation. The aforementioned attitudes may determine a position of art in the curriculum. However, there is nearly always a possibility to affect the status of the subject in schools through its teaching, that is, through the actual work that teachers and children do. Let me make this clear:

¹⁷ Reid, L. (1986). *Ways of understanding and education*. Heinemann Educational Books for the Institute of Education, University of London, p. xii.

¹⁸ Eisner, E. (1976). *op cit.*, p. 219.

- a. I do not believe that the position of art in the curriculum may be significantly advanced by improving the quality of its teaching alone.
- b. As we shall see, for an allegedly peripheral subject like art, a poor standard of teaching may have more impact than in other subjects. Poor teaching may emphasize its marginal status or result in its elimination from the curriculum. Nevertheless, a better quality of art education might contribute to improve the concept that the school community has about art and could perhaps, in the long term, help to provide a better status for the subject in schools.
- c. By improving the status of art in this context, I do not necessarily mean to increase the amount of time allocated to the subject. In the great majority of schools, the curriculum content and structure is dictated by the main educational authorities and cannot be easily changed. However, according to my experience as an art teacher, it may be possible to modify other aspects, such as allocation of resources (space, materials, etc.), because these are more directly controlled by local school authorities. The most important aspect may be a positive change of attitudes in the school community as a whole. This may effectively support the need of art in the education of children.
- d. Bearing in mind the present Chilean context, it seems to me that if art teachers and others involved in art education want to improve the status of art in the curriculum, they have no better alternative than to attempt this change through their own work in schools illustrating that art is a worthwhile activity.

However, in my opinion, art teachers tend to neglect or ignore the influence that their work may play in determining the status of art in schools. It seems useful, therefore, to examine in detail some attitudes toward art education which are directly related to the art teacher's work.

Art Education for the Development of Manual Skills Mainly by Means of Drawing Exercises

One emphasis throughout the history of Chilean art education has been the teaching of drawing in order to develop skills and the ability to copy. There is evidence of this fact in the literature of art education. Testimonies of art teachers about their own experience on the subject of art when they were primary or secondary school children show that, until some decades ago, the teaching of drawing was still mainly focused toward the development of technical skills and the ability to copy.¹⁹

Bearing in mind this historical tendency of teaching drawing mainly to develop skills and the ability to copy, an important question is: What influence has the historical tendency to reduce the teaching of art to drawing had upon the status of the subject in the curriculum? This is a complex question which cannot be fully addressed in this study. However, it may be posited that the concept of art education for the development of manual skills, mainly by means of drawing exercises in Chilean schools, has contributed toward the marginal status of the subject. This is, of course, difficult to prove. This assumption is based on the view that a narrow experience of art during school education helps to generate a narrow conception of art in society. Schools play a significant role in shaping the concepts that the vast majority of people have about the various areas of knowledge. This view implies that the feelings, understandings, and attitudes that most people have toward science, philosophy, art, and so forth, are very much influenced by their own experience in these areas in primary and secondary education.

¹⁹ See for instance, Astudillo, E., (1972). Fine arts. In *Aisthesis n. 7*. Chilean Journal of Aesthetic Research. Catholic University of Chile. p. 281 or Gonzales, C., (1972), p. 170.

Hence, if the above view is true, the historical tendency in Chilean art education to reduce the teaching of art mainly to copy drawing exercises has contributed to a poor conception of art. This conception may be shared by ordinary people, and also those who achieve military, political, religious, and other kinds of power in society. Thus, the possible outcome of the above conception would result in little support, in indifference or in an oppositional attitude, to the value of teaching art in public education.

Art Education Inadequately or Insufficiently Justified in the Curriculum

In the last point of this section, I would like to examine how the ways in which the role of art has been justified in education may have influenced the present position of the subject in schools.

There is a close relationship between the status of a subject in schools and its need for justification. A subject with a lower status in the curriculum requires greater justification of its role in schools. Substantial evidence of this fact may be found in the history of Chilean art education, which is very often an account of justifications. This is not difficult to explain. From its introduction, art has been considered a vulnerable area within the curriculum. Its supporters have constantly searched for means of defending and promoting. The need for justification is present in art syllabi and in the literature of art education. There is nearly always a first chapter in texts devoted to the support of inclusion of art in schools. This often takes the form of discussions of the aims of art education.

The issue I want to consider now may be summarized as follows:

- a. Among the justifications used to support art in Chilean schools, there are many slogans, myths, and vulnerable ideas which are therefore inappropriate and ineffective in persuading authorities, parents, and others of the need for art education.
- b. Inappropriate or weak justification for art in the curriculum may be a significant factor which contributes to the marginal status of the subject.

Mary Louise Serafine, referring to persistent myths in the way in which art education is justified, has said:

One finds in many answers to the question "Why do schools need the arts?" the triumph of myth and superstition over the sort of reasonable justifications which, though they may not be provable, would at least make sense and bear scrutiny. The certitude and confidence with which these beliefs are stated are indeed troubling. No doubt certitude is the symptom of our having fallen into the habit of using as justifications only that which is already ingrained in our thinking, taken for granted, and unquestioned.²⁰

Let us consider some justifications within the Chilean art education literature, in order to illustrate the presence of myths and vulnerable ideas. For instance, Ramón Lopez in 1889 wrote: "It is not necessary to make a great effort in order to see clearly that, among all the school subjects, no one has more positive value and practical meaning than Drawing."²¹

This is, of course, a very personal assumption which is easy to refute. If it were so simple for the educational authorities to see clearly that drawing is the subject which has "more

²⁰ Serafine, M. (1979). Persistent myths about art education. In *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, v. 13, no. 3, p. 6.

²¹ Lopez, R. (1889). In *One hundred years of art education in Chile*, V. I. p. 15.

positive and practical value" in the curriculum, it would not have been in a marginal position in Chilean primary and secondary education for nearly one hundred years.

Guadalupe Matus in 1920 said: "The teaching of drawing contributes to educate honest men with good criteria and the ability to understand and sincerely interpret nature" [sic].²² I do not deny that the teaching of drawing could, eventually, contribute to moral education; especially if it is aimed toward this purpose. However, as Vincent Lanier has said:

If the teaching of art makes people moral... then those who have been intimately involved in that making, artists, should be as a group, discernibly more moral in their general behavior than the rest of us. One does not have to be an art historian to refute that claim.²³

Many other examples could be added to illustrate the presence of myths and slogans in art syllabi and in the written works of individuals concerned with art education. This is not to say, of course, that the vast majority of justifications are necessarily naïve or inadequately formulated. Neither am I trying to suggest that this is a particularly Chilean problem. According to literature from other American and European countries, this would seem to be an international tendency which we have inherited from Europe and the United States and then cultivated into our own style.

Perhaps one of the main features of our style in this matter has been to over-emphasize, through theoretical discourse, a magical conception of art in education, as if art were the fundamental means to make education a worthwhile and valuable experience for children. In Chilean education, one of the most influential foreign ideologists in this respect has been Herbert Read, who, according to Fraser Smith, "was the 'father' of present-day art education and perhaps the most well-known magician of all."²⁴ This is clear when Read suggests, for instance, that art should be the core of education and the main influence to improve the moral standards and create a world of peace.

After considering some examples in order to illustrate the tendency to justify art in the curriculum by using inappropriate and vulnerable statements, let us consider how this tendency may have influenced the present status of art in the curriculum.

According to Lanier: "We cannot do a first rate job of teaching with second rate conceptions of the value of art and the purposes of art education."²⁵

Lanier's argument suggests that the issue about different ways of justifying art in the curriculum is relevant from theoretical and practical perspectives. It is significant due to the influence that justifications may affect content and process of teaching art in the schools. For instance, if the role of art in the curriculum is seen only as providing opportunities of personal expression or development of technical skills, then we provide insufficient theoretical foundations to justify art education. Children's education in art is also impoverished, resulting in a citizenry without a broad understanding of the role of art in human experience. A narrow and vulnerable conception of aims may be particularly dangerous for the status of a subject like art, since it is under constant threat of extinction and requires continual justification in the curriculum.

²² Matus, G. (1920). Complete reference unavailable at publication date. Write author. p. 181.

²³ Lanier, V. (1980). Six items on the agenda for the eighties. In *Art Education*. September, 1980, p. 18.

²⁴ Smith, F. (1980). In *Values and evaluation in education*. Roger Straughan and Jack Wrigley (Eds.). Harper & Row Publishers, London, p. 145.

²⁵ Lanier, V. (1980). *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Summary and Conclusions

From the point of view of the attitudes toward art, the most important elements which would seem to determine the status of the subject may be summarized as follows:

- Art in society is perceived as politically and morally subversive. Therefore, its teaching is considered to have the potential of a critical function in schools, a potential which may be particularly dangerous in those countries which are governed by authoritarian and oppressive systems.
- Art tends to be regarded mainly for artists and the élite. As a result of this misconception, it would seem that there is no logical justification for its teaching in schools. On one hand, it is believed that art can only benefit a small group of children, and, on the other hand, that it cannot actually be taught.
- Art is seen as a futile activity in a culture dominated by a technological ethos. Thus, many children, particularly in secondary education, as well as parents and educational authorities, consider that if we are living in a world which mainly demands pragmatic and instrumental knowledge, there is little sense in teaching courses such as painting, sculpture, and drawing.

From the point of view of the attitudes toward education, three fundamental issues were addressed:

- Schools as social institutions chiefly aim to impart information and to educate children uniformly. Hence, these institutions do not seem to be the most suitable places to teach art, which by its very nature tends to encourage children to be original and to develop freedom of thought.
- The fact that education is mainly seen from the perspective of social and economic mobility deeply influences the structure of the curriculum and thus the status of art in schools. Because art from economical and social angles is not seen as a profitable activity for the majority, neither is it considered to be important within education.
- Education is regarded as being for "intellectual development," while art is mainly associated with feelings and emotions. Since feelings and emotions are not considered to be part of intellectual development by many, the subject of art can only aim for a minor status in the curriculum.

From the point of view of the attitudes toward art education, two main issues were examined:

- The historical tendency in Chilean art education has been to reduce the teaching of art mainly to drawing exercises in copying, aimed to develop technical skills. This has contributed to promote a narrow conception of art in schools and in society.
- Art education has been inadequately or insufficiently justified in the curriculum. Hence, a narrow and vulnerable conception of the purposes of art in education has significantly influenced the way in which it is approached in schools. This is particularly dangerous for a subject like art, which is under constant threat of extinction.

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