

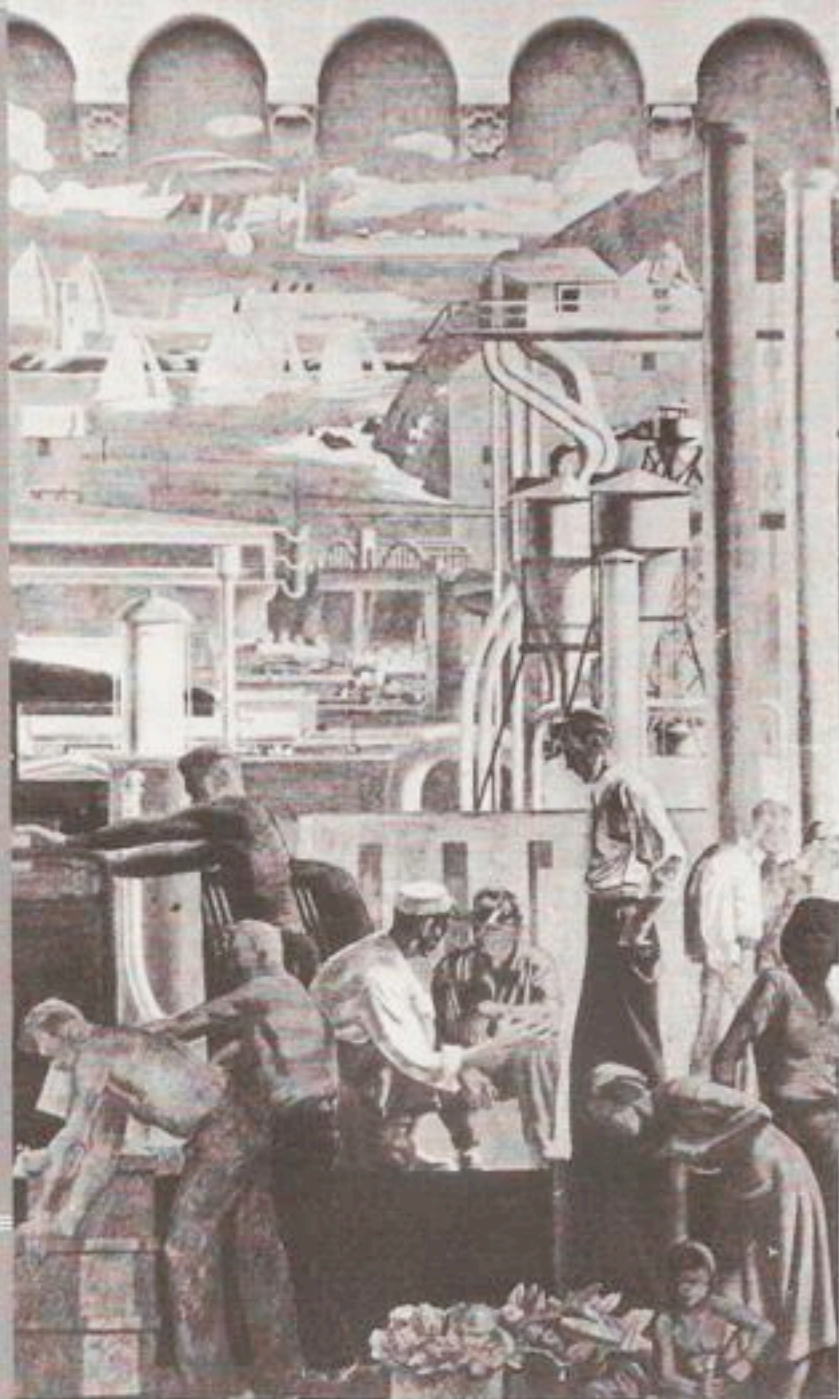
PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

Arts

in

Education

OCT·1935



A Functional Basis for School Arts

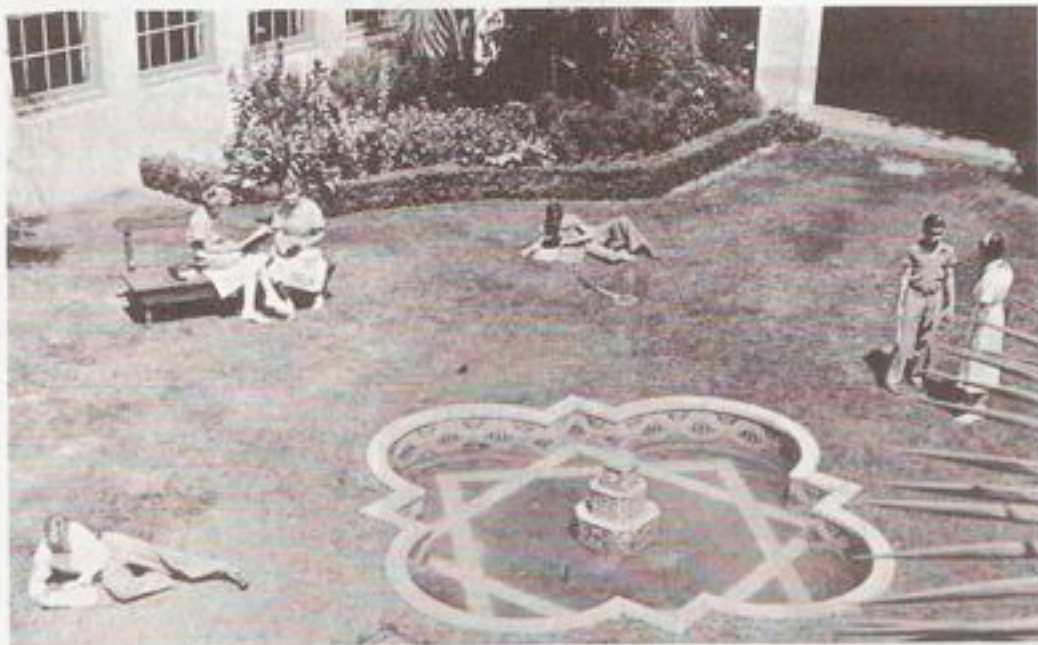
G. DERWOOD BAKER

IN MANY SCHOOLS where music has for years been a field of joyous expression and creative experience, the art departments are still attempting to enlarge the scope of subject matter in order to achieve an out-moded academic respectability. Primary emphasis is laid upon developing drawing skills and the technique of painting. The instruction stresses such intellectual concepts as composition, subordination, opposition, balance, line movement, and color harmony, and presents appreciation lessons

The South Pasadena Junior High School is widely known for its outstanding work in art. It has, indeed, become the art center for the community. Mr. Baker, Principal of the school since its establishment seven years ago, holds the view that art functions when it "has meaning and comprehensible values." His article briefly describes some of the group art activities in the school.

in classical art. So conceived, art is a subject-matter-centered field of instruction.

Under the impact of the progressive movement in education, art, along with other subjects, has been attempting to find its place in the integrated program. In an integrated unit of instruction, art ceases to be either a subject field or a field of specialty. In proportion as the unit has vitality and partakes of the nature of genuine community living, art activities in the unit lose their identity and become an integral part of construction and expression. The elementary class at work upon a well-organized unit is a community closely akin to a simple primitive society. The art activities of the group should and do assume the same status that they have everywhere held



Student-designed fountain and part of the garden in the patio



Frescoes of California history: The coming of the Spaniards

The coming of the padres



The coming of the tourists

in primitive social groups. Most learnings take place personally and directly.

But what of units of work on the secondary level where vicarious experiences and differentiated development come to play an increasingly significant role? Shall art continue, as in the elementary school, to be merely the tool of the core unit or shall it assume more nearly its normal status in our modern communities?

The answer which we have given in developing our program in the South Pasadena Junior High School is that art is not only a tool of the core unit; it is a way of life. It will contribute richly to form of expression and to social interpretations in the integrated core unit, but it has values so significantly its own and contains possibilities of such wide scope that it should not be forced to expend all its energy pulling on the English-social-studies cart. In taking this position we are not defending "art for art's sake" or attempting to pre-

serve this subject-field as sacrosanct. Our aim is to provide abundant opportunities for every boy and girl to experience art as it functions in modern life, to provide a broad variety of creative, social experiences in which esthetic objectives play the dominant role.

Teachers and administrators need constantly to be reminded that integration is a process going on in the life of the child, rather than something which is achieved in the course of study. Activities which are partial, fragmentary, restrictive, or which are entered upon through stress of external necessity are liable to be disintegrative in their effect upon the developing personality of the pupil; on the other hand, any activity which enlists wholehearted participation in a worthy social enterprise is integrative in its total effect. If integration and wholeness are the conscious objectives, and if the instruction is guided by sound psychological principles, an integrated unit of work can be developed just as properly in the



Wall hanging for the library after the manner of medieval tapestries

art department as in any other. A brief description of the way in which the activities of the art classes have been made a part of significant social enterprises and the work of the pupils given a functional basis may help to clarify this position.

Making one's surroundings more beautiful is unquestionably a legitimate social and educational objective. In 1930, the student body of the South Pasadena Junior High School accepted school beautification as its major objective and called upon the art department to assume leadership in the movement. The first steps taken toward this goal were the purchasing of vases for flowers, decorative ceramic urns for the school foyer; furniture, curtains, and rugs for office waiting rooms; and draperies for classrooms. These projects involved money-raising activities and necessitated conferences with artists and experts in the field of interior decoration which, in turn, served to strengthen the desire of the pupils to



Fresco: The southern California city

extend the program and take a creative part in its fulfillment.

A fountain was suggested for one of the interior patios. The ninth grade art class undertook the problem of design and launched into research on Spanish and Moorish fountains. Each pupil in the class designed a fountain and the tile to be used in it. All these drawings were evaluated and criticized before the class by an artist-architect and, on the basis of his criticism, a new class plan was drawn. Scale drawings and blue-prints were made by the boys in the mechanical drawing class, forms for the concrete were constructed in the woodshop, and tile designs were perfected in the art class. It was a great day in the life of the school when the student body assembled for the ceremony of breaking ground for the fountain. For more than a week afterward, boys worked on the excavation, set the forms, and poured the concrete. The tile was manufactured from student designs by a local tile company and set in place by an expert tile setter. At the dedication exercises, when the president of the student body and representatives of the art class made the presentation to the Board of Education, everyone was fully aware that the pupils had, through this project, acquired a new, vested interest in the school. It was *their* school, for were they not contributing to its physical and artistic character?

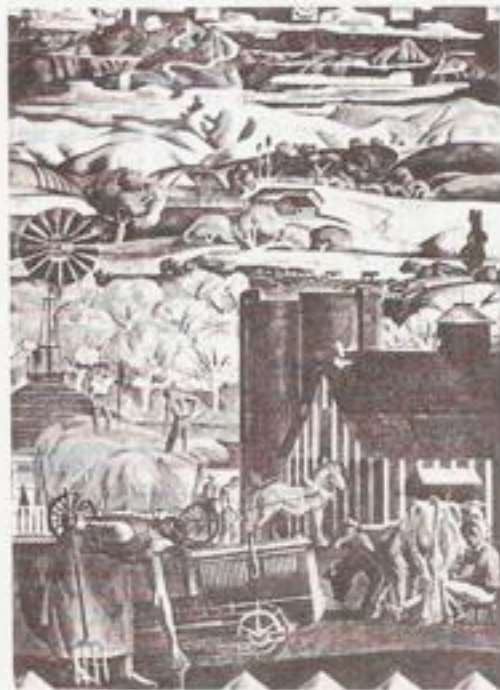
The following fall found the student body ready and anxious to extend the program of beautification. A student committee of ten was appointed to work with a citizens group, including an architect, a decorator, and an artist, in developing a ten-year program. The first item decided upon was the gardening of the fountain patio. Annual and perennial flowers and shrubs were purchased and planted by the pupils. The committee also decided that the atmosphere of the school would be greatly improved if the pupils could have some part in planning color schemes for their individual classrooms, to replace the sombre, stand-

ard tan. The Board of Education saw cost obstacles in the way of such a program but granted permission to the student body to use one large classroom as a demonstration unit. The committee worked out a delightful modern treatment for the room, using five different color tones, and employed a painter to execute the plan. The demonstration proved the desirability of lovely classrooms but left the matter of expense still unsolved. A compromise was reached whereby the Board agreed to furnish paint in requested colors whenever the pupils could employ the painter. The proof of the depth of the pupils' interest in making their environment as attractive as possible is shown by the fact that in the last four years all but five rooms have been redecorated in modern color. During these years of depression, home-room groups have collected and sold old newspapers, held benefits and denied themselves other uses of their funds in order to make their room artistic. Many groups have gone farther, remodeling furniture and acquiring drapes, vases, pictures, and art objects.

The satisfaction which the ninth grade art class achieved through the completion of the fountain has led that group year after year into projects far more pretentious than any contemplated in the original ten-year program of beautification. One class undertook, without previous experience, to create for the library a wall hanging, after the manner of the medieval tapestries. This project involved research into the history of tapestries and a study of their subject matter, a study of materials and dyes, and experimentation with various available techniques. Each pupil in the class of thirty submitted designs for class criticism and evaluation. The best conceptions from all designs submitted were finally developed into a class design which was enlarged in charcoal to full scale (14'x19'). Transfer of the outline was then made to linen yardage and the color applied with

cold-water dye and wax crayon. Perhaps the most thrilling part of the project came as we watched as many as sixteen pupils at one time, swarming like ants over the material, applying the dye.

The following year the class accepted the challenge of the mural possibilities in a cafeteria wall space of 11' x 49'. Here the main problem was that of developing an idea worth expressing or a story worth telling. After a great deal of experimentation and many false starts, the story of foods of the nations finally took form and was accepted. Individuals or small groups worked upon sketches for different nations and peoples. After class criticism, these were enlarged to full scale on wrapping paper and finally copied on the wall. The painting was done with ordinary poster paint but, on the rough wall surface, it had a very pleasing effect. As they saw their concepts taking form under their hands the enthusiasm of the boys and girls was unbounded. They worked before school, after



Fresco: The mountains and farms of southern California

school, in the evenings and on Saturdays. In three weeks the entire space was covered.

Exhilarated by the feeling that their efforts were functioning in the life of the school and the community, the class of the following year and the instructor set out to conquer a new world. Four wall spaces in the fountain patio challenged them to attempt frescoes in the Italian primitive manner. Two of these panels were completed in May and June of 1934, a third was finished in the spring of this year, and a final panel challenges the new class this fall. The story of early California history is portrayed in four epochs: Spanish exploration, missionary settlement, gold exploitation, and tourist invasion. (Reproductions of three of these frescoes are shown on page 374.) No extended account need be given of the development of these themes or of the difficulties to be surmounted in applying and painting fresh plaster. The important fact is that fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys and girls have created noble works of art, have made their school a priceless possession of their fellow pupils and of the community, and have acquired a sturdy confidence in their own creative capacities. Art on such a basis has meaning and comprehensible value. It functions.

Not only mural work and school beautification but dramatic events play a large part in providing a functional basis for art instruction. The art department advises and assists other departments of the school with their dramatic endeavors but beyond that it has for the past five years created, costumed, and acted an original pantomime annually.¹

Pantomime is unsurpassed as a medium

¹These performances have become so widely recognized for their beauty and power that they have been presented before large audiences of parents and members of the community, before large university groups and teachers' institutes.—*Editor*.

through which to release the varied talents of boys and girls. Freed from the necessity of translating their feelings into dialogue or of synchronizing action and lines, these young people create interpretations which are breath-taking in their beauty and originality.

A variety of methods have been followed in our development of the pantomime. In the "Peasant Princess" the pupils created their own fairy story, costumes, etc., and selected recordings to accompany the action. In "The Princess and the Swineherd" they made an adaptation from Hans Christian Andersen's folk tale of the same title, and enlivened it by creating masks for all the characters. In the latest production, the combined boys' and girls' glee clubs, with violin, flute, and harp accompaniment, sang a choralized version of Tchaikovsky's classic ballet, "Sleeping Beauty," while on the stage the art pupils pantomimed the story. One performance of this production, under the sponsorship of the Southern California Art Teachers Association, was played before an audience of eight hundred teachers and administrators.

One does not need to add that such an art program makes art one of the most real and vital offerings in the curriculum. Through it, repressed children find avenues of expression; adjusted ones discover in it a challenge equal to all their talent. Hesitant and shy children develop confidence in their own ability and discover the satisfaction to be found in serving the community. This is integration. It comes as a by-product whenever the activities of the classroom have functional value in the life of the child, the school, or the community.²

²The cover illustration of *PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION* and the pictures on pages 376 and 377 are reproductions of frescoes in the South Pasadena Junior High School by Millard Sheets, a talented young California artist.—*Editor*.

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A problem in personal experiences: A pupil remembers the glamour of "Dressing up"

A group of problems which the children also enjoyed was one in which they drew and painted from life. Students dressed in colorful costumes borrowed from the school costume room, served as models. Sometimes a story was read and the model represented the main character. This approach never failed to bring interesting results. The painting of still life composition has its place in the learning process in that it *does* teach the student to be observant of one object in relation to another. The subject matter, however, should be arranged by the students and be either as dramatic or amusing as possible.

This group of problems is preliminary to the development of the two group activities of the year—the pantomime and the

class contribution to the school beautification program. Through these smaller problems, growing out of the imagination as well as the real life experiences of the children, the boys and girls acquire a confidence in their ability to create and a working understanding of the elements of art. With this background, the creation and development of the larger group activity is assured. However, it would be impossible to overestimate the part which the anticipated class activities play in giving significance and meaning to these preliminary problems. The pupil is not only expressing himself in a new and fascinating medium, but he is preparing himself for the opportunity to make a significant contribution to his community.

South Pasadena Junior High School Student Paintings



Two pupils work out a problem in line movement and related color

South Pasadena Junior High School Student Paintings

Fishermen: A problem in
line movement and
complementary color



Vachel Lindsay's "Congo":
A problem in book
illustration

