

Reading Review One

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Sienkiewicz, C. (1985). The Froebelian kindergarten as an art academy. In B. Wilson & H. Hoffa (Eds.), *The history of art education: Proceedings from the Penn State conference, 1985* (pp. 125-137). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.

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Summary

I was fascinated by the reading this week as it opened my eyes to the correlation between the history of art education and the foundation of the Froebelian kindergarten, developed in the mid-1800s. In Sienkiewicz's (1985) article, "The Froebelian Kindergarten as an Art Academy," she explains, "The kindergarten and art education have much common ground in the area of pedagogy. Both are concerned with the manipulation of materials, the development and awakening of the senses, and the unfolding of creativity in the child" (pg. 125). Sienkiewicz presents the history and development of the kindergarten based on German educator, Friedrich Froebel's vision of creating an educational program that nurtured the physical and sensory skills of children through the act of play. Froebel recognized that children learn through sensory perception and interacting with the world in relationship to their own body. Therefore, he created his kindergarten curriculum on the basis of activities that allowed the child to interact and experience the lessons through the act of guided play that reinforced learning and comprehending through various sensory experiences. The three key principles of Froebel's kindergarten that are adopted by art education are sensory learning, symbolization, and self-activity or play (pg. 125). As Sienkiewicz explains, "Touching, feeling, seeing, manipulating, tasting, listening, in fact any method of perceiving and reacting to the environment, is essentially background to the production of art forms, whether on a child's level or the professional artist's" (pg. 130). In the art classroom emphasis is placed on learning how to construct images or objects through the manipulation of one's hands in order to represent or symbolize a concept that has greater significance to the individual's experience of the world. Through the form of art projects, students are given the opportunity to experiment and play as a tool to perceive and be cognizant of their internal and external reality. Froebel understood that, "The future development of the child must be founded on his own personal individuality—on the development of his own selfhood from within the whole life of the child is a life of education" (Chalke, 1916, pg. 63, Sienkiewicz, pg. 131). Art education revolves around this same principle, believing that the art

teacher is more of a guide or mentor providing the environment, tools, and resources for students to engage in their own creativity and innovation as a means to discover truths and answers that resonate with the individual's life experiences, providing growth and understanding of the world. As the mid 1800s rolled into the early 1900s, education theorists began to see the value of self-activity or play as an integral component of the educational development of children as they continued on from kindergarten and throughout the education curriculum. Today the art classroom maintains its roots as the place within school curriculum where students learn about themselves, their environment, and reality through sensory perception. What better way for students to learn and comprehend than from experiencing their world directly and individually? As Sienkiewicz explains, "[Play] is the most important phase in spontaneous development of the child, because it allows him to exercise harmoniously all his physical, emotional, and intellectual qualities. Play combines attention with relaxation, purpose with independence, and rule with freedom" (pg. 132). After reading Sienkiewicz's article this week, I am refocused on what my intentions are as an art educator. I am reminded of the cognitive benefits of the act of play.

Key Points

- *Sensory learning* is one of Froebel's three main concepts that embody both the pedagogy of the kindergarten and art education. By providing students with a lesson that involves the senses, students are able to understand and react to their surroundings, make personal correlations, and comprehend their lived experiences. Art education is built on the foundation of sensory learning, because as art teachers we provide students with the opportunity, tools, and resources to interact with and create images and objects that explore the individuals understanding, learning of, and interaction with life experiences.
- *Symbolization* is another one of Froebel's key principles of the kindergarten that has been adopted by art education practices. Symbolization is a method that allows students to make correlations with objects, activities, and actions that can take on a second or more worldly meaning. For example, Froebel encouraged the sitting of students in circles as a symbol of unity or family time. In art we emphasize the use of symbolization as a tool to

create deeper meaning and further connection and understanding of reality and human experience.

- *Self-Activity* or *Play* is a third major component of Froebel's kindergarten pedagogy and encourages learning by experiences that involve sensory perception and interaction with the body. In the art classroom, teachers provide the environment, tools, resources, and concepts to allow students to learn through individual self-activity involving learning and comprehending through sensory experiences. Art teachers encourage students to be creative in their play and for each student to come up with their own solutions in their creative problem-solving process. By getting their hands involved in the learning process, students make correlations with the topic they are learning about and how it related to their personal life experiences and growth as an individual.

Personal Reflection

As an art teacher in contemporary society I have a very specific vision for the environment of my classroom and that is to create a safe and comfortable environment where students are able to share ideas, perform activities that are new and perhaps out of one's comfort zone, and creative problem solve with the ultimate goal of developing self-identity and self-confidence. In other words, I create a classroom environment where students are not afraid to try new things on the quest of discovering new things about life and themselves that they were not aware of prior to enrolling in my art classes. Students make discoveries through guided play. I use the word "play" a lot with my students and make a concerted effort to destroy the mind's fear of failure. When students are encouraged to try new things and "play" connections are made and confidence is developed as students become immersed in the act of experimentation and accomplish personal goals or skills that they had no previous awareness of. My high school students lose perspective of how sensory experiences directly correspond to learning and retaining of information and knowledge, and the art education I strive to provide is a reinforcement of lived and sensory human experience as applied knowledge. Self-activity, or play, is essential in the artistic process. As Sienkiewicz reiterates, "...the foundation of the present day art classroom with its rich, stimulating visual environment, developed from the first

conception of kindergarten as a place for learning through the senses, for activity in the form of play and for the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of young children,” (pg. 127). From the Froebelian concept of introducing play into the structure and foundation of education, art educators have continued to provide a safe environment where students can develop necessary social, emotional, and cognitive skills through activating the learning experience through the senses. Therefore, the act of guided play offers a holistic learning approach that has remained in art education since its inception in kindergarten classrooms developed by Froebel in the mid-19th Century.