

The ideology of childhood as a period of innocence, unbridled spontaneity and in need of adult guidance has long permeated the field of art education. Yet, as Duncum argues, such an idealized view overshadows the unpleasant realities of many of the children in our charge today. How might taking a more realistic stance on the concept of 'childhood' inform your thinking and practice as an art educator? What concerns, if any, do you have about adopting such a perspective?

First of all, children should not be raised in a bubble, protected against the unfortunate truths of reality...but, children also do not benefit from having a heavy dose of reality on a daily basis either. There needs to be a balance. If adults segregate children and speak to them in lies and misleading explanations, they are possibly causing harm in the long run, when the child does learn the truth and then develops trust issues. At the same time, if adults treat children like equals, children are forced to grow up too quickly and take on the burdens and responsibilities of a world they have not fully been exposed to and therefore cannot fully comprehend. Personally, I don't believe in baby talk, with over simplification, or lying to children...I do believe that sometimes it is necessary to simplify complex topics with children in order to explain things in a way that they can relate to without causing further duress, confusion, or misunderstanding. And, sometimes it is necessary to protect them from certain things. I also understand that teachers have an even more complicated task laid out before them in regards to communicating real world situations/ "grown-up" themes with students because the classroom is filled with children that are all being raised with different customs and belief systems. I'll never forget how upset it made my sister when she walked into her son's school to pick him up at the end of the day; he came out into the hall and in front of other children, parents, and teachers screamed at her, "You lied to me! You told me Santa Claus is real and he's not! Even my teacher said he's not real!" Wow, what a mess...Who's fault? What do you do in this situation? My nephew has never trusted his mom because of all the "adult themed" Disney movies, books, television shows, etc that she protected him from, and then of course because of situations like the debunking of Santa Claus. He's extremely smart, and the bubble she tried to keep him in eventually burst and backfired. There has to be a balance. I am not sure I fully agree with Duncum regarding many of his reflections and interpretations of childhood. I do believe that childhood is sacred and should be a time of nurturing the individual, of creativity, of personal expression, and it should be a positive and fun time in one's life. I also am a firm believer that it should not be delusional, sheltered, and over protected. Children do exist side by side the adult world and therefore encounter worldly issues that are beyond their life experiences. It is in these moments that adults need to collect their thoughts and words carefully and educate our children to understand pieces of the big picture while also preventing harm. It is okay that the child may feel empathy, or have an emotional response, but teaching about concepts that go beyond the childhood experience need to be proceeded with caution (and truth). Children have eyes and experience the world through their five senses, just like any adult. It is important as adults and especially as parents and teachers that we place ourselves in the shoes of our children and try to see the world from their perspective. There is much to be learned from the eyes and experiences of children. We cannot shelter them and avoid the truths of the world they live in and see reflected around them on a daily basis, but that also doesn't give adults the right or reason not to protect them from many of the world's unpleasantities until the right moment comes to educate that child. Most importantly though, we cannot lie to our children out of a desire to keep them safe and pure. As educators, especially, we need to teach children to feel and to begin to understand that the world is big and complex, but that all of us, children and adults alike, can work together to improve things and people in the world that might need a helping hand. The classroom and the art room are definitely places for students to experience some of the unpleasantities of reality because some of those unpleasantities ARE the reality of many of our young

students. However teachers decide to teach such issues though, it needs to be done in a very sensitive matter. The art room can be a place where students can communicate their understanding of the world through visual representations and stimulate certain discussions. The teacher must always chose words carefully, remain objective and unbiased, and be sensitive to how children learn and process information.