

Abstract:

The Significance of Artistic Practise in Adolescence

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The transformative nature of practising as opposed to training will be considered within the context of adolescent development in our times. Drawing on the works of philosophers such as E. Herrigel and P. Sloterdijk, as well as on educators such as J. Dewey, O. Bollnow, E. Eisner and M. Greene, the manifold possibilities of personal development through the practise of the arts will be discussed. The case will be made that in considering the particular and unique challenges in growing up in a world characterized, for instance, by the 'acceleration of time' (H. Rosa) and continual distractions and amusements (N. Postman), it is precisely the embodied experience of practising in an artistic realm, whether in music, theatre, painting, dance etc., that offers the finest possibilities of initiating and realising long-term developments in adolescence today.

Practising artistically involves continually working on the entire human being; physically, emotionally and intellectually. At the same time, and most crucially, volitional and will forces are continually called upon and exercised through these processes. Viewing puberty and adolescence as a kind of 'critical period' of development, implying a high degree of formability, it will be argued that artistic practise and learning can be considered exemplary for all learning at that age insofar as much less is 'taught', than generated and learned by the pupils themselves. Maxine Greene writes:

"I believe that the learning provoked by what we call aesthetic education is paradigmatic for the learning many of us would like to see. Learning stimulated by the desire to explore, to find out, to go in search. This is the learning that goes beyond teaching – the only significant learning, I believe. It is self-initiated at some point, permeated by wonder, studded by moments of questioning, always with the sense that there is something out there, something worthwhile beyond." (M. Greene. *Variations on a Blue Guitar*. New York: 2001, 46-47)

The highly personal nature of such self-initiated searching and exploring can be viewed as an expression of universal human processes in which young people are given the opportunity to realise those uniquely individual and 'higher' dimensions that lie within them, that the "something out there, something worthwhile beyond" is not only to be found in the world but within themselves. At the same time, in the particular context of our own age, offering such possibilities of artistic practice seems to be more vital than ever before.