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**The Artist in Each of Us: Teaching Methods to Inspire and Rekindle the Artist Inside**

After reading Florence Cane’s book, ***The Artist in Each of Us***, I was inspired by her unique ability to see each child for who they were- their needs, desires, behaviors, and driving factors. While I’m sure that she didn’t come to this revelation in a short time, but rather after years of experience in observing and working with children and adults, I think she really did have a talent for reading people and communicating with them in ways that would help them become better versions of themselves. I am so glad that she chose to do this in the realm of visual art.

Throughout the book she talks about the developmental stages of a child’s life and how the art assignments given to them need to be appropriate for their cognitive and skill levels. She saw the inner psyche of the child and knew the importance of striking a balance between positive praise and critical suggestion. She illustrated in many of her case studies examples of children and adults that had been mentally scarred from rigorous, strict and close-minded art curricula and the biased condemnation of other art educators. She knew just the right formula for feeding and developing the mind and emotions of the child until they were ready for pruning and picking in their future lives. It was interesting to see how many of her illustrations of children’s behavioral issues showed through in their choice of subject matter and methods of creating art. Working through their chosen illustrations, Cane would propose a line of questioning or suggesting that would help the student to see their reason for creating these images and how they could grow and develop both their work and their behavior. The neat part is that she would do it all in a passive and gentle way that cast a “spell” on the student so that they made the decisions themselves to improve their work in their own time and in their own way.

Florence also illustrated the reason that many people lose touch with their uninhibited, raw artistic sides during adolescence. Once children enter into the pre-teen or “gang” mentality stage, they allow fear and insecurities to creep in on their work because of their elevated need for acceptance. Thus, they will begin mimicking dull and simple objects or people in their surroundings in an effort to achieve more realism when in fact that lost all emotional ties to the subject that they are portraying. According to Cane, emotion or “feeling” was a crucial key to any artwork that is created in order for the true inner artist to come forth visually. She combated this stiffness and lack of inspiration with her various exercises and activities that “release” the artist inside. She felt that any child could be led to bridge this gap in their artistic lives through understanding what was happening and understanding their inner needs and thoughts through symbols.

Through various stretching and deep breathing exercises, Florence Cane helped to connect each student’s body with their spirit in order to help the deep-seeded artistic impulse have a clear path out onto paper. She used chanting along with these movements to help trigger colors and images with sound. Through conversations she discovered what was important to the child and then helped to lead them into memory recollection through visualization and observation activities. She did not tell the students what to do upon entering the room; neither did every student do the same assignment. They simply began with these exercises and activities and the child would be inspired by the power of their own visions and feelings in their minds to create artworks from the materials that were laid out accessible before them at all times. She healed them emotionally and mentally first and then they were “released” to be able to become artists through an elevated understanding of themselves.

What Florence Cane did was therapy. She helped students from all different backgrounds and problems to find their healing and their true selves through artistic creation. She allowed their stories and their progress to develop her own thoughts and to mold herself along the way through these deeply personal relationships with her students. She truly connected to each of them and wanted to help them find the path to their own success so that they could use art in the future as a way of healing, of self-discovery, and as a way for working through their problems. Some of her students went beyond that and found ways to use their talents in a career of art, but many commented in the text that they felt they had a “leg-up” on their competition because they had learned ways to problem-solve and integrate their own style of personal expression into each task without compromising themselves.

Cane developed a measure for determining artistic talent while working at the Counseling Centre for Gifted Children at NYU. She looked at four different factors: body, psyche, mind, and spirit. Body, as expressed by movement, was measured by the quality of line, rhythm, balance, and observational skill in a work. Psyche was determined by the student’s grasp of contrasts as seen through a quality of feeling, sense of life, light and dark dynamics, and richness of colors. The mind was judged through the organization of a work, specifically the evidence of imagination, design, form, space, and relativity. Spirit was the essential quality of the work or eminence of the student’s personality, or “artistic voice” and individual expression. These are the specific techniques that she taught within her classroom to create more intelligent and balanced artists. Her system was used by many and considered a forefront in the identification of gifted and talented children in the visual arts.

Overall, Cane’s sole published work was jam-packed with higher thinking and perspective on how an artist grows and develops. An art educator needs to be sensitive to the emotional and mental needs of the student upon their entry to the art room before the child can really begin to make progress in their artistic endeavors. Helping students to accept and understand these aspects of themselves will help them to gain confidence in their individual expression and to feel comfortable and knowledgeable in illustrating this expression in their artworks. They will find the most joy in their artwork when they never lose sight of their inner voice and never stop catering to their wants, needs, and problems through visual expression. By unifying the body, mind, and soul, any person can feel cleansed every time they create new work and the benefits will spread into every aspect of their lives.

**Reference:**

Cane, F. (1951*) The Artist in Each of Us*. Craftsbury Common, Vermont: Art Therapy Publications.