

Art Expression for the Child

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FRANZ CIZEK, professor of the Industrial Art School in Vienna, has made a notable contribution to art education through his young people's classes in art.

Through correspondence and conferences with individuals who know him and have visited his school, by reading lectures and bits of conversation compiled by Francesco M. Wilson and Bertha Lange, one may learn to appreciate this quiet, mild, modest, yet distinctive and forceful man.

Over twenty-five years ago he began experimenting by conducting free classes twice a week for both rich and poor children. His methods caused much discussion and opposition, but today his psychology is considered sound and the progressive public schools of both Europe and America are giving the child the opportunity to express himself from within out, rather than from without in, as has been the generally accepted method in art instruction.

Professor Cizek's teaching is based upon four main ideas: (1) Education, (2) To permit the child to be himself, a distinct personality, (3) to allow the child to grow or develop naturally, and (4) The child's right of self fulfillment.

Cizek believes that education begins with the parents, of whom he states there are three types; first, those who are always trying to make children follow in their own footsteps; second, those who neglect their children altogether; and third, the ideal kind who watch their children develop and are ready to help and encourage them when necessary.

He has also found there are three distinct types of children; first, those that are so strong in personality that they

express only what they themselves feel; second, those who keep their individuality and yet show outside influences; and lastly, those who submerge their personality through the influence of others.

He urges that a child be allowed to

fourteen years and occasionally older if they desire to continue with him. He prefers to work with children who are less sophisticated than children of rich parents, since the former are fortunately not able to attend so many movies, theaters and amusements which are based more or less successfully on the adult point of view.

He does, perhaps, in his zeal for self-expression of the child, minimize the importance of learning to appreciate the art of the past. Since but a few of the many become creators in the field of art, a knowledge and appreciations of the rich heritage of art seems to most of us most essential. Undoubtedly, it would be less difficult for each country to develop distinct styles in architecture, sculpture and painting if the children of all lands might have teachers who give the inspiration, encouragement and joy in creation that Cizek gives to his pupils.

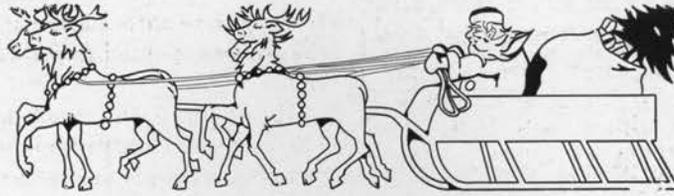
When Francesca Wilson, who has written charmingly of conversations with him, asked, as she looked at the remarkable work done by his pupils, "How do you do it?" he said, in his modest way, "But I don't do it. I simply take off the lid and other masters clap the lid on—that is the only difference."

When a new pupil, who has fortunately reached his turn on the waiting list, enters Cizek's class, he finds himself in a room containing fifty or sixty children working happily in expressing their own ideas in various type of materials. There are no models of natural forms, but the long room, with windows at one side and a platform at one end, is gay with the colorful pictures and interesting toys that

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grow to fruition as does a flower, out of its own roots. He feels it is most harmful to force the style of an adult upon the child's expression. He contends that child art expression is not merely a step to adult art, but that it is a thing apart, and should so be considered. He loves best to work with very young children, who express themselves mainly to formulate their own ideas, but he does keep children in his juvenile classes up to



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have been made by the children. A music box, a phonograph and seats of varying heights form the furniture.

The new arrival watches the children absorbed in their work and then is taken by this great master into the storeroom, which contains many different mediums of expression suited to the child's development. Here are charcoal, colored paper, scissors, clay for modelling, wood for wood-cuts, carving and sawing equipment, crayons, chalk, paints and brushes, paper and canvas. After selecting the material with which to express his idea, he joins the happy workers.

It is not unusual to hear the children talk of their work during its progress, as, for example, "Here I place the man, here his wagon full of packages to deliver," and again, "What a jolly 'frau' and how red I'll make her cheeks, just like the apples in her basket!"

The children love music and American records, which are often so full of humor and action that they inspire them in their work. True, we have in America used music for similar purposes and also for design, but it is interesting to know that Cizek, too, likes its inspiration. The radio has many possibilities for expression, as well, because of its varied and fine programs. Wouldn't it be fine to send him one for his children?

Bi-monthly, which in time would be about one-fourth of the eight class periods, a composition on some subject familiar to the class is required. One of Cizek's lessons was Autumn. On paper of the same size, with charcoal and paints, the children were asked to express the idea, using a figure that would fill the space well, the head touching the top of the narrow marginal line which the children were first to draw, and the feet touching the bottom. With these limitations the class discussion began. Various ones told how they intended to carry out the idea, and undoubtedly many of us would have been surprised to learn how rapidly their ideas were formulated, and how directly, vividly and successfully they were expressed. Cizek went about the class, encouraging here, criticising there, suggesting that some get farther away from their work in order better to see their compositions as a whole and so as to secure greater freedom. This is just as

any good art teacher would do, but Cizek did not change the drawings, even if some were poor in proportion. He feels that if a child makes a head too large, a body too long, or arms too lifeless, they should be left that way. He does, however, remind them that they ought to sketch lightly the entire figure before working out any detail, or else they are apt to make the head so large that there will not be room on the page for the entire body and the feet must touch the bottom margin.

The keenness of observation, the humor, joy, gayety and speed with which they worked could never have been secured in a problem unrelated to the child's experience and under an instructor who did not have such a deep understanding and love of child life.

After sketching with great interest about an hour and a quarter, the class seated itself in a circle, full of eager anticipation, as Professor Cizek began the class criticism. The compositions were discussed in a kindly spirit, the beauty of this and that one, seeming even lovelier because of the instructor's appreciation. Only those compositions that had utterly failed to express the idea, or were unduly influenced by some one else's work were passed without favorable comment. He insists upon original and sincere self expression. As is to be expected, in a large class of varying ages, the quality of work varies considerably, but over a third of the work was unusually fine, while most of the remaining was better than average work.

Miss Bertha Lang feels that the Austrian child finds greater joy in doing things and loves to enrich the thing which grows under his hands more than does the American child, who has the greater impulse to do, to finish, and begin something else. I doubt this would be true under similar conditions. In the Sioux City public schools, where free expression of school subjects and experiences of the child have been carried on for more than fifteen years under Superintendent M. G. Clark, the children work lovingly over a piece of work, bringing it to the highest perfection possible for them. The English books written and illustrated by the children grow from day to day throughout the year and are then bound by the children into permanent form. These books are treasures, indeed, and are cherished by both parents and children. The Des Moines schools

also are emphasizing free expression with fine results.

Professor Cizek does not give the children their own work to keep, since he feels that it is the creating and doing that counts, rather than the finished piece of work. That the development of the child is more important than the product is true, but we prefer to have our children keep their work and note their progress from time to time. Parents also need to encourage their children, and unless work is taken home this is impossible. Every school room, unfortunately, does not have a Professor Cizek.

Older children, after considerable experience, work with apparent ease, but Professor Cizek has found, as we have, that at the adolescent age the child becomes too self-conscious and critical of his own work to continue creative work, or if he does, it is apt to be sentimental or there is a striving to do work similar to the adult, in which case the child's personality becomes submerged. According to modern psychologists, if parents and teachers allowed the child to develop naturally during this period without trying to superimpose their own personality upon them and were careful not to give unfavorable criticism as, "You're awkward; so thoughtless and careless," but would try to understand him and encourage him by commenting upon his good points, even this period might continue unbroken so far as progress in other ways besides that of art is concerned. It is well worth our effort to assist him over this period.

Cizek's pupils do not become artists. They enter into every field of life; and he likes to think of art as a vital part of every day experience. He does regret to have a pupil lose his distinctive method of expression by studying in a school where there may be danger of becoming a small copy of his master.

In the adult classes of Cizek, much so-called modern work is done in illustration and design. Inspiration is found everywhere. Nature's laws of growth of bud, leaf and flower, rather than naturalistic renderings, form the basis for composition design. Abstract forms are considered very important. This is the same emphasis we place in design. Cizek says, "God created nature and it is good," but it should not be copied naturalistically and called design. The limitations of the material and the type of design

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When he refuses to bathe in his specially provided bird-bath, the children enjoy the privilege of giving him a shower bath by sprinkling water with their fingers. Edwin asked if the teacher thought the canary would like being put under the hose. Jean said, "He ducks like it's raining." Peter assumes a part of the adult responsibility by always asking to help the teacher carry the cage.

The gold fish are often patiently watched for several minutes. Peter and Marilyn were given chances to use the net to catch them. Peter was very conscientious about the fish's inability to live out of water. He merely held him imprisoned under the water.

Billy often asks for the song about the "merboy", who said,

"And I would wear a swordfish,
And gently feed and pat,
The dog-fish and the cat-fish,
They'd be my dog and cat."

Some of the older children were taken on a trip to the barns. Much interest was found in the goats and sheep. When Edwin saw the pens, he asked where "Billy Goat Gruff's Bridge" was. This familiar story had meant more to him than just words.

Many authorities feel that the child under nine is better off without the exclusive ownership of live pets because until the child is older he really has not developed enough of the fostering instinct toward animals. However, the child need not be deprived in any way of the opportunities of learning about them. Under the close supervision, he can learn much about animal nurture, and service to others. Angelo Patre has said, "Children should have a chance to become acquainted with animals, if their happiness is to be complete."

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suitable for it are also stressed by him. Only by considering both may a logical and satisfactory result be secured. These ideas are held by all good designers.

The South Kensington Museum of London has a collection of wood cuts made by the pupils of Cizek. Would that each country might have a national museum for the work of its children. It is so spontaneous, so free, so unhampered by adult laws of expression if it is done under a spirit akin to that of Cizek.

NOTE: *The Applied Art Department has in the exhibit room of Home Economics Hall an exhibit of reproductions of the work of Cizek's pupils. This was obtained from the Iowa Library Commission at Des Moines from Miss Julia Robinson. The transportation charges both ways only need to be paid. Such an exhibit is a real source of inspiration to both children and adults.*

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