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COGNITIVE STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT
IN THE
EDUCATION OF POETIC APPRECIATION:
A THEORETICAL AND CLINICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

The development of poetic appreciation is investigated by combining philosophical analysis with Piagetian-type interviews in order to argue a general case for the fundamental importance of knowledge and the emergence of cognitive abilities in the education of artistic appreciation. Coleridge's poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is used as the object of appreciation for a series of clinical interviews involving 30 subjects, 10 at each of three different age-levels: $9\frac{1}{2}$ - 10 year olds; $11\frac{1}{2}$ - 12 year olds; $13\frac{1}{2}$ - $14\frac{1}{2}$ year olds. Illuminative protocols are drawn from these interviews to illustrate various aspects of the educational theory that is advanced. This theory draws upon recent research and writings in the philosophy of art, literary criticism and developmental psychology as these relate to curriculum problems in the appreciation of art and literature. The educational implications of the argument are then synthesized into a tentative theoretical framework for the teaching of poetic appreciation.

The rejection of positivism and recent moves towards epistemological pluralism are used to support the claim that artistic appreciation, no less than science, is a domain of public knowledge characterized by critical enquiry, objective canons, and concepts shared within a socio-cultural tradition. It is contended that because appreciation presupposes an interpretation which entails "seeing" works of art and literature under an appropriate aspect and in correct relationship to their context, artistic appreciation is not the result of merely subjective or idiosyncratic responses to artistic experience but requires an initiation into the understanding of relevant concepts, the knowledge of publicly identifiable criteria, and a gradual induction into the interpretive mode of reasoning.

It is argued, moreover, that emotional responses to art are not "inner" subjective states but are themselves structured by cognitive appraisals of the aesthetic object. Hence, there is an important distinction between an affective response to the experience of art and an appreciation in which emotion is controlled by valid interpretation. Because this control presupposes public norms and the knowledge necessary to apply them, the education of the emotions through the appreciation of art and literature is necessarily cognitive.

Thus, it is argued that the education of poetic appreciation, as with other forms of art, requires the development of interpretive reasoning ability and specific cognitive capacities such as metaphoric competence and perceptual discrimination. The development of these capacities involves the progressive equilibration of cognitive structures exhibiting features of wholeness, transformation and self-regulation.

The task of the teacher in the education of poetic appreciation, therefore, is to provide the experiences of poetry necessary to the understanding of poetic meaning, and to make available the knowledge necessary to an educated and mature appreciation. The key to such appreciation, it is claimed, lies in developing the ability to construct valid, comprehensive and consistent interpretations on the basis of relevant contextual knowledge. Only when this ability has been developed can evaluation, or the critical appreciation of poetry become a central focus for education.

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