



Education: The Art Most Noble



Paideia High School
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So . . . What *is* education?



To define something, we must first find its essential nature.

Tell about teaching geometry students to define things.

τέχνη



While our English word *art* comes from the Latin *ars*, the concept relates to the Greek word *τέχνη*, which translates into English as *art*, *skill*, or *craft*. Thus, we may think of the *art* Vincent Van Gogh employed in painting his famous *Starry Night*, the *skill* of a carpenter who makes a perfect dovetail joint, or the *craft* of a potter working in clay. In a sense, all of these, embodied by the Greek word *τέχνη*, are also embodied in the English word *art* when properly understood.

What is common to all three of these examples of art? We're back to our *three elements* of an art. In each case, we see an artist, a medium, and a work of art. Van Gogh works in oil and canvas to create a painting, the cabinetmaker works in wood to create fine woodworking, and the potter works in clay to create unique pottery. In education, then, who is the artist? What is the medium? And what artwork is created?

Types of Art



We must look deeper into some types of art to see how education is an art. One can classify some of the various arts as *fine arts*, *manual arts*, or *cooperative arts*. In addition to painting, music is another example of a fine art. Workers who build skyscrapers, balancing hundreds of feet in the air on beams as if they were on the ground, exercise a manual art.

But what is a cooperative art? Could the cultivation of a plant be an art? Let's think about it. The work of a farmer is a work of art. If left to themselves, a farmer's fields would not produce nearly what they do under the farmer's care. There is certainly an artist at work. The medium is plant life, and the artwork is the yield of produce representing the fruit of artistic effort. There are many types of art, many not named here, that can be classified based on the type of medium transformed by the artist.

Cooperative Arts



Cooperative arts, then, are those arts worked upon the medium of living things to produce something nature would not if left alone. We've discussed the work of a farmer who works in the simplest form of life, the vegetative. A veterinarian works in the medium of animal life, while a doctor works with the human body. Just as with farming or gardening, the "artist" creates a qualitative and quantitative difference in the yield of plant life, a veterinarian and a doctor do similar things. In terms of quality, a veterinarian and a doctor produce an improvement in health or an extension of life that would not be the same without the intervention of their art. In terms of quantity, health is often achieved in less time as a result of their cooperative arts. In addition, the length of life may be extended.

The Art Most Noble



***“Education has for its object the formation of character.”
--Herbert Spencer***

Yet, there are other cooperative arts when one thinks beyond the body, which animals and persons share in common. Unlike animals, which can be trained in bodily skill and conditioned in response to stimuli, the human person can also be educated because human nature is rational and free. The soul, according to the most ancient sources, such as Aristotle who wrote during the 4th century B.C., is simply the principle of life in living bodies. That living bodies have life is a truth too simple and obvious to deny. We will follow the ancient tradition and call that life principle the *soul*.

Herbert Spencer was a 19th century English philosopher who understood that education was a cooperative art. His quote, “Education has for its object the formation of character” echoes the work of an artist. Just as a potter works in clay, a non-living medium, a teacher works in the human soul, a living medium. Just as a potter produces *the formation of clay*, so also a teacher produces *the formation of character* as Spencer says. Character can be understood as the full formation of virtue both intellectual and moral.

The Art of Formation



***"The human body is the best picture of
the human soul."
-- Ludwig Wittgenstein***

But how are we to understand this *formation*? The word occurs in literature about education over and over again. We might ask, "What is formed?" Spencer's answer may satisfy us for awhile, but inevitably, if we pursue the matter of understanding education further, we ask where is this *character*? What, precisely, is it? In what does it inhere?

As the 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein noted, "The human body is the best picture of the human soul." We can understand the formation of the human body because its results appeal to our senses. Just as the human body is formed unseen, within the womb of its mother, and the results of this formation become visible in the growing child, so also the human soul is subject to formation and the results become visible in the unique character of each person.

As I was driving one day in the spring of 2009, my mind turned to this idea of formation. How, I wondered, could I teach it? Communicate it well?

I understood that education is the art of formation, that heart is what we call that formation, that the formation itself is unseen although its effects can be seen. How could I express the reality of this largely invisible formation?

The muses must have been on duty during that drive, because the answer grew within my thoughts as I continued driving. For parents, experiencing the formation of a new child prior to his or her birth provides for a great analogy. As Wittgenstein said, "The human body is the best picture of the human soul." In fact, I thought, the human body is the *only picture* we could possibly have of the human soul. Immaterial things cannot be *pictured* in the mind except by reference to something material. The idea that the human person is an ensouled body naturally leads to the thought Wittgenstein expressed so briefly and so well.

The muses struck again when I gave this presentation on March 19th, 2010. At the beginning of the presentation, I was inspired to mention the idea that in addition to being an *art* education could be understood also as a *call*. As I spoke about this slide, another inspiration hit me. I spoke about how mothers and fathers differ in their experience of the reality of a new baby. For a mother, I said, the baby is quite real in utero. But a father, in my experience, must have something more tangible. The reality sets in uniquely for a father only after feeling the baby move and then becomes deeply real only after the baby's birth. That's all I said during the presentation.

Afterward, a kindergarten teacher approached me and told me how much that part of the talk meant to her. It touched her deeply, she said, because every parent remembers the first time they ever held their baby. However, she continued, she thought I was going to go further with the point by relating it to the idea that education is a call. She explained that when she first held her baby she felt that call, a call to care for and nurture her beautiful child, a call to provide for education, for the knowledge her child would need to grow happily and well rounded, for the moral formation her child would need to make good choices in life. She described what she was talking about as *reciprocity*. At the beginning of the talk, I had mentioned how even toddlers felt the call when they talked about what they want to be when they grow up, when they want to learn to read, and when they begin that phase of endless questions. I had also mentioned the call an adult feels to provide for a child's education. This is the *relationship* aspect of education. The point she thought I would make in regard to reciprocity is that this mutual call between parent and child is itself part of the adult's lifelong educational call and journey. She grasped for the right words to make the point that had touched her so deeply, the point she thought I was going to make but didn't. As I asked questions to clarify her insight, it became clear to me. She was expressing the idea that every teacher has experienced, the idea that to teach is to learn. What we teach, we learn more deeply than anything we ever did from the student side of the relationship. But this wasn't why she was so touched. She felt the impact of how the parent/child relationship itself is a call that provides not only for the child, but also for the parent's ongoing formation. By giving what nature calls a parent to give, a parent receives a deeper formation of her (or his) own soul. It is by giving that we receive.

Formation of the Heart and Soul



***“You don’t have a soul. You are a Soul.
You have a body.”
-- C. S. Lewis***

The word *character*, used as we have been using it, is quite modern. Classically, the much more common word is *virtue*, which is traditionally understood in two aspects: intellectual and moral. These two kinds of virtue relate to the understanding of the soul as being composed of two attributes: *intellect* which corresponds to a person’s rational nature, and *will* which corresponds to freedom.

The word *heart*, like the word *formation*, occurs over and over again in the context of education, especially when the goal is to inspire. For example, that framed inspirational card I referred to earlier has the word *heart* occurring several times; and not only that, but tiny heart icons also separate the running stream of quotes that make up the card. I don’t think the idea that *heart* and *education* somehow go together is much of a stretch for any of us.

But what does it mean? One way of making sense of the two words is simply to note that *heart* and *soul* are synonymous. However, in a natural sense, I believe there is a distinction. While *soul* generally refers to the principle of life in a body, *heart* is that *part* of the soul in which we form habits. In this sense, then, the formation of the soul happens only as a result of forming the heart.

Character



***“Character is higher
than intellect.”
--Ralph Waldo Emerson***



***“People do not lack strength,
they lack will.”
--Victor Hugo***

The *character* or *soul*, then, is composed of both intellect and will; it relates to *heart*. All of these words indicate the life-force itself, a non-material substance subject to the formation of both reason and free will. While these ideas may lay uncultivated in us, we somehow know their truth; they inspire men of letters like Emerson who said, “Character is higher than intellect,” and Hugo who said, “People do not lack strength, they lack will.”

Virtue



A virtue is simply a good habit.

We have seen that, in some sense, the word *character* speaks to the formation of a good soul, and that goodness is captured by the word *virtue*. But what is virtue? It is simply a good habit. We use another “V” word when speaking about bad habit. That’s right, *vice*. Education, therefore, refers not to the formation of just any habit; it speaks to the formation of good habits, not vice but virtue.

Intellectual Virtues

Speculative Intellectual Virtues	Practical Intellectual Virtues
Understanding: The habit of considering first principles of truth.	Art: The habit of right reason about the good works to be made.
Knowledge: The habit of grasping the truths of different subjects.	Prudence: The habit of right reason about what to do or avoid.
Wisdom: The habit of rightly judging all things and setting them in order according to first causes.	



“We sit down in our thinking chair and think, think, think.”

--Steve, Blue’s Clues

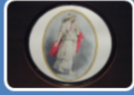
Steve and Blue think. They exercise the intellectual virtues when solving Blue’s clues. But what are the intellectual virtues?

Aristotle first classified the various virtues, and his greatest student, Thomas Aquinas, clarified them. It was Aquinas who classified the intellectual virtues into the two categories *speculative* and *practical*. The speculative virtues include *understanding*, *knowledge*, and *wisdom*.

Now, instead of the word *knowledge*, our English word, Aquinas used the Latin *scientia*, which is often translated as *science* for obvious reasons. However, the Latin word in the 13th century when Aquinas wrote, more closely conformed to our word *knowledge* than *science* because of the subsequent historical development of science as a specialized field of study in its own right.

The practical intellectual virtues include *art*, which we’ve seen, and *prudence*, which needs a bit more explanation. As we’ve discussed, *art* is *know-how*, or *skill*, or *craft*—all of which reside in the intellect. *Prudence* is the one virtue that unites both the intellect and the will as we will see.

Moral Virtues



Prudence

- The habit of knowing what to do or avoid.



Justice

- The habit of giving others their due.



Temperance

- The habit of sacrificing for the greater good.



Fortitude

- The habit of facing hardship for the greater good.

Prudence heads the list of moral virtues, which goes on to include *justice*, *temperance*, and *fortitude*. *Prudence* is the habit of knowing what to do or avoid both in thought and action. Consequently, it conforms to *truth* when referring to the intellect and to the *good* when corresponding to the will.

Of the remaining three moral virtues, they can be divided into virtues directed toward one's own good and to the good of others. Justice, the habit of giving others their due, is obviously directed toward the good of others. Honesty in relations between people as well as fairness are examples of the virtue of justice.

Of the two virtues oriented toward one's own good, temperance can be considered *negative* in that it speaks to the habit of sacrificing for the greater good, and fortitude can be thought of as *positive* in that it refers not to what one should *not* do, but to what one *should* do. Thus, *courage* means nearly the same thing as *fortitude*; both refer to the habit of enduring hardship for the greater good.

Physical Virtues



Dance

and

karate

for example.

I would like to make a brief diversion to the topic of physical virtues. They certainly exist as I hinted earlier when speaking of training the body. For example, dance and karate are arts that develop physical virtues. They certainly are part of our formation as we grow. But they do not distinguish our uniquely human attributes expressed in our nature as rational and free. Consequently, with the great Aristotelian philosopher Mortimer Adler, I do not include the physical virtues as part of *education*. Instead, I use the word *training* to distinguish this type of formation.

Character Formation



“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

-- Abraham Lincoln

An 1864 Matthew Brady photograph shows Abraham Lincoln reading a book with his youngest son Tad looking on from the side. The juxtaposition of this photo with a Lincoln quote about character presents a classic image of formation, both intellectual and moral. Lincoln said, “Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.” Where are our more contemporary icons of the fully developed soul, one that reflects deeply both intellectual and moral development fully ripened not only for the good of the individual soul, but also for the good of all? Certainly Lincoln embodies this image; there are more books about him than any other figure in American history. We are endlessly fascinated with this man of character—one educated humbly whose life is an education for us all.

Philosophy of Education



Education is the cooperative art whereby a teacher works with the heart and soul of a child to nurture the formation of virtue, both intellectual and moral. Parental choice in education is inviolable.

We have finally arrived to the place where we can answer the question that has been our theme. What is education? Education is the cooperative art whereby a teacher works with the heart and soul of a child to nurture the formation of virtue, both intellectual and moral. Parental choice in education is inviolable.

Questions?



Mark Selle is superintendent of both the Valley and Orient School Districts in Washington State. He also serves as Alternative Learning Experience Director of the Colville School District. He earned his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree and teaching certificate with a double-major in mathematics and philosophy from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington in 1984. He earned his Master's of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Educational Administration from Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington in 1995 and his Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Educational Leadership from Washington State University in Pullman, Washington in 2005. Mark is married to Angela Jackson-Selle, his wife of 25 years. They have six children and live in Valley, Washington.

Mark can be reached through the Valley School District (www.valleysd.org), headquarters of Columbia Virtual Academy (www.columbiavirtualacademy.org).