

Back to the Drawing Board

Children can and should be taught how to draw.

By Bruce McIntyre

Can you picture a civilization in which the communication of visual knowledge is no longer a problem — a society in which the teacher, when a visual description is called for, would merely pick up a piece of chalk and draw the picture on the board, and students in such a society who, through drawing, are able to exchange, communicate, and discuss visual information?

Imagine what it would be like if all educated people — all teachers, carpenters, electricians, physicians and surgeons, biologists, machinists, and other skilled and professional people from all walks of life — were able to use drawing to exchange visual ideas to the same extent which they now use writing to exchange verbal ideas.

It is being overly generous to say that 5% of our college graduates know how to draw. There is no successful drawing program in our public schools. Leading educators, because they themselves are unable to draw, have felt that they were not in a position to add drawing to the curriculum.

For almost a hundred years, educators tried to teach drawing in our public schools. Their methods were unorganized, and too few people learned how to draw. These educators, instead of evaluating their own teaching methods and objectives, looked at the work of their pupils and concluded that, “Where talent is lacking, the teaching of drawing is of little value”.

This attitude has led to the popular belief that the ability to draw is an inborn talent. What better, more comforting excuse can a person have for not learning to draw than the conviction that he is utterly void of talent?

Beating a retreat from their attempts to teach drawing, educators then incorporated a number of loosely-related activities and changed the name to “Art”. By changing the name of the program from “Drawing” to “Art”, those responsible virtually killed the chances of our having a sound program.

Today, many art supervisors and teachers maintain that there is no “right” and “wrong” in drawing. They think that drawing is a matter of taste and that no confining rules can be laid down. They say that rules inhibit the child and suppress his “originality”.

The truth is that teaching drawing effectively is not so different from teaching arithmetic. Children should learn arithmetic in a sequential, rule-based fashion. They should be taught their numbers and rules for addition and multiplication, and told that there is a right way and a wrong way.

Drawing, too, should be taught in a sequential, rule-based fashion. Unfortunately, the new art programs do not teach children how to draw at all, let alone a right way and a wrong way.

One of the main objectives of today’s public school art programs is “free expression” (creative self expression). However, people who do not know how to draw cannot express themselves freely. Teachers, for example, who cannot draw, cannot express themselves freely on the board.

The intended meaning of free expression is really expression free from rules (anything goes), but this kind of an objective leads nowhere. The other common objective, “appreciation”, is something which must come from within and cannot be imposed from without.

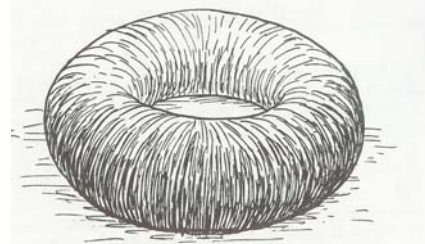
If the subject is understood — if the student knows how to draw — appreciation will follow, and so will free expression. If the subject is not understood — if the student does not know how to draw — neither appreciation nor free expression can exist in the true sense of the word.

Trying to teach drawing without an organized system is like trying to teach music without a scale, a staff, a clef, and notes.

(Adapted with permission from [The Drawing Textbook](#). Mr. McIntyre was an artist with Walt Disney Studios; he is currently an art teacher.)

The Seven Laws Of Perspective

There are seven ways to make one object or part of an object appear to be closer to you than another.



- The near part of the doughnut is drawn closer to the bottom of the picture, making use of the first law of drawing, **surface**.
- The near part of the doughnut is drawn larger, making use of the second law of drawing, **size**.
- **Surface lines** “wrap around” the doughnut and help to give it three dimensions, making use of the third law of drawing.
- The near part of the doughnut overlaps the far part, making use of the fourth law, **overlapping**.
- **Shading** is used to help give volume to the doughnut, making use of the fifth law of drawing.
- The near part of the doughnut is drawn darker and with more detail than the far part, making use of the sixth law of drawing, **density**.
- The whole doughnut is foreshortened, making use of the seventh law of drawing, **foreshortening**.

It should be pointed out that no one can draw anything in perspective without using one or more of these laws. Conversely, anyone who understands these laws and knows how to use them will be able to draw almost any object, provided he knows the shape of that object.