

BY ERWIN SICHER

What are we doing in our schools and colleges to train the eyes and ears of our young people to see and hear; and after their eyes and ears are open, to appreciate, to understand, and to interpret the visual and auditory world?

A few weeks ago I visited the Museum of Natural History in Vienna. Under a glass case stood one of the oldest creations of humankind, the Venus of Willendorf. I was deeply moved by this encounter. Once again I was reminded that human beings created art objects long before they left any other records of their thoughts and deeds.

For ages, artifacts were the clearest representations of human beliefs, achieve-

ments, and civilization. They expressed the

most sublime aspirations of religion, philosophy, and social reform; they portray[ed] ideal types of human being, both physically and mentally, conceptions of a better way of life and a more perfect social order.¹

Art works today are as vociferous in their statements concerning the nature and hopes of our civilization as at any time in history. "Art is the visual representation of any age, the true mirror of the times, by which men may see themselves if they

are not afraid to look."²

Unfortunately, college students today do not look. They have eyes, but they see not; they have ears, but they hear not. They have little appreciation, understanding, or knowledge of the arts.³ Unfortunately, this includes Seventh-day Adventist college students.

What are we doing in our schools and

colleges to train the eyes and ears of our young people to see and hear; and after their eyes and ears are open, to appreciate, to understand, and to interpret the visual and auditory world? Thus far, Adventist colleges have done little to dispel the deplorable artistic ignorance of their students. While most SDA colleges do offer art courses, the majority of students continue to be graduated without ever having taken such a course. But even if a student is fortunate enough to enroll in an art class, his or her understanding

and knowledge probably remain limited because the course is skills-oriented, or

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because the arts are viewed as isolated achievements.

In most of our colleges, the arts and other achievements of human beings through the ages are taught separately, as though each were a unique event. A student may simultaneously study Sumeria in history class, Lope de Vega in Spanish class, Paul in Bible class, the respiratory system in anatomy class, Shakespeare in literature class, and vase painting in art class; or if he is really fortunate, he may learn about Gropius and Bauhaus archi-

ecture. A month later he may be occupied with Roman history, Cervantes, John the Revelator, Renaissance poetry, Vesalius, and Chagall. Still later in the same semester topics like the Third Reich, the discovery of the circulation of the blood, Garcia Lorca, Barth, Salk, and Oldenburg will compete for his attention. At the end of the semester the student will have absorbed a great many isolated facts, but will have little understanding of how—or if—they relate to one another.

It is very likely that most students will live and die without ever understanding that Il Gesù, Pozzo's *St. Ignatius in Glory*, Bernini's *St. Teresa in Ecstasy*, and Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* are aesthetic concretions of the Counter-Reformation spirit. They will not know that the architecture of Hardouin-Mansart, the gardens of Le Nôtre, the sculptures of Coysevox, the murals of Lebrun, the music of Lully, and the tragedies of Racine were the products of the same aristocratic, absolutist culture. They will not realize that Dürer, Luther, and More were contemporaries; as were Jefferson and J. L. David; similarly Greenough, Delacroix, Hugo, and Berlioz; and Picasso, Joyce, and Stravinsky.

If classes were structured so that young people studied about the ancient regime, Louis XV, the Petit Trianon, Rameau, Boucher, Clodion and Hyden, both together and independently, how much more they would know!

Likewise, they would gain deeper insights into American history if their

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study integrated information about post-Civil War railroads and industries with the study of Twain, Eakins, and Homer, and the skyscrapers of Sullivan. Making such connections does not produce a simple sum of items learned. Rather, it geometrically increases the meaning and significance of what is learned and enlarges the student's vision of the world.

One path to the realization of such educational goals is through interdisciplinary studies, which draw upon two or more subject areas and lead to broader and deeper insights.⁴

Why Are Interdisciplinary Studies Needed?

To understand the need for interdisciplinary courses, one can begin with a question of such proportions that the answer lies outside the purview of a sin-

gle discipline.⁵ For example: What is the Renaissance spirit? Such a question requires a variety of disciplinary insights, each of which grows out of more specific questions than are appropriate to and approachable by a single discipline.

The answers to these more specific questions (achieved through disciplinary methods) are then reconciled and integrated to give the Big Picture. To give an example, political science, economics, literature, religion, the arts, linguistics, and history all provide information that is fundamental to an understanding of the Renaissance spirit.⁶ Yet, none of these disciplines alone can satisfactorily address the larger issue.

Whether a given question is disciplinary or interdisciplinary depends upon the contribution of each subject to the central inquiry. If, for example, an interdisciplinary study of the Renaissance spirit draws on various disciplines that contribute substantially more to the answer of the question than the arts do alone, the question should therefore be presented in an interdisciplinary class.

Educational Benefits

Interdisciplinary courses provide a number of educational benefits.⁷ Among these are awareness of the interconnectedness of the world, the ability to see issues holistically, and the freedom to explore issues without regard to artificial disciplinary barriers. These studies also encourage unconventional thinking and

novel insights. But most important is the development of thinking skills demanded by the integrative process. "Synthesis is one of the higher order skills in Bloom's taxonomy," according to Newell and Green, "and we know that it is one of the few educational products which students retain after leaving college. Best of all, synthesis enhances creativity."⁸

Students in interdisciplinary courses seem to be more critical, less willing to take things at face value. They tend to look more for bias because they are aware of how disciplinary perspectives color the outcome of research. Since they are taught to seek new perspectives and insights, they are more open to new ideas. Also, they are alert to the ethical dimensions of issues and have a greater tolerance for ambiguities.⁹

Unlimited Possibilities

This list of benefits strongly suggests that interdisciplinary studies have value for Seventh-day Adventist institutions, which pursue many of the same educational objectives. Consequently, interdisciplinary courses should be instituted in our colleges, beginning with the arts and other relevant disciplines. There are few limitations on the type of disciplinary material that can be joined to the arts in interdisciplinary courses, as long as the central question is carefully chosen.

Materials from the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences can be brought together in an appropriate course. But

even the sciences need not be excluded. Although art and science are commonly regarded as polar opposites, they are really interdependent. "Artistic and scientific modes of inquiry do not exclude, but enhance and balance each other."¹⁰

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Artists and scientists are directed by the same spirit of an era and by a "commonality of the creative act."¹¹ Topics such as Creativity and Imagination in the Arts and Sciences, or Twentieth Century Art and the Modern Physical Sciences (i.e., cubism and relativity) suggest some of the interdisciplinary possibilities in the arts and sciences.

Ideally, colleges should offer a number of interdisciplinary core courses that introduce students to the visual arts as well as the other disciplines included in the liberal arts, demonstrating the subjects' interdependence and interpenetration. At the same time, each academic discipline should continue to train students in its respective specialty. Thus, students would be educated to see the forest as well as the trees, the whole as well as the particular.

Advocating an Interdisciplinary Arts Program

No program, no matter how ideal, ever becomes a reality unless it is accepted enthusiastically by staff and administration. For that to happen it must be advocated knowledgeably and persistently. Anyone who wants to sell an interdisciplinary arts program must be able to appeal to the administrators' and professors' interests.

Administrators see themselves today in a cauldron of pressures from alumni, parents, chairpersons, teachers, and students.

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ENLARGING THE VISION: INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN THE ARTS

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A strong interdisciplinary arts program can help them to alleviate these pressures, satisfying competing demands of rival groups. For example, the proposed program could minimize the demand for more disciplinary core courses by giving everyone a share in required interdisciplinary classes.

Of course there is always the question of funding. Because of declining enrollments and budgets crippled by inflation, little extra money is available. Administrators can be assured that a small interdisciplinary program will require few additional expenditures. In fact, all that will be required is rearranging existing human and financial resources.

Administrators are experiencing growing demands for accountability and competency testing. Consequently, they are deeply concerned about student performance. But students continue to do poorly because they are able to avoid subjects not included among the required courses. Interdisciplinary studies could fill some of these gaps, and as a result, students would do much better on many required general tests. The school would end up looking stronger academically.

And what college administrator is not interested in image and public relations? A strong interdisciplinary program, besides being educationally sound, will facilitate greater academic achievement and improve the college's intellectual reputation.

The interdisciplinary arts advocate must carefully prepare the program concept prior to presenting it to the administration. A poorly conceived program, couched in unfamiliar terms and lacking a clear sense of its goals, or one that requires an inordinate amount of follow-up work invites rejection. Thorough preparation will help to guarantee a positive response.

In planning strategy remember that the administrator, "that grizzled, old, uncooperative fuddy-duddy went into the school business originally because of a love for students and a burning idealism."¹² Despite years of pressures and stresses, hardships and difficulties, a glimmer of that idealism remains. Show the administrator how students' academic performance and personal lives can be improved through interdisciplinary stud-

ies in the arts, and you will get his blessing for the proposed program.

Promoters of interdisciplinary programs also need to be politically adept. They need to seek out those who share a common interest and build powerful coalitions that command attention. Sell the program to your colleagues, department heads, and adjunct professors. Seize every opportunity to promote its value to board members and union education directors.

Developing an Interdisciplinary Course

Faculty members with strong backgrounds in relevant disciplines should work together to develop the interdisciplinary course. Team development is preferred, because it focuses perspectives and contributions. In a course thus planned students will be exposed to basic concepts, methodologies, and theories as well as the findings in individual disciplines. By observing the world

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through the eyes of various disciplines the students will come to understand how different subject areas approach the central problem of the course.

By using this approach, insights will emerge relating to each individual discipline. If these insights are interrelated and mutually enriching, they can be integrated; if they are inconsistent, they can be synthesized by taking a broader view. This process of conciliation and integration offers "more meaningful experiences than can be achieved through separate study of narrowly defined subjects."¹³

Interdisciplinary Teaching

Interdisciplinary teaching demands a great breadth of knowledge. One way of dealing with such a vast territory is team teaching. By dividing the course into sections taught by experts in different fields, providing a comprehensive overview will be a less-daunting proposition.

The important concepts to remember in team teaching are *cooperation, com-*

munication, and collaboration. Team teachers should be flexible, adaptable, and not easily threatened by experts in other disciplines. They should be eager to learn from their colleagues. All team members should attend every class.

The team should meet regularly to evaluate their efforts and make necessary adjustments. In the classroom, each teacher should ensure the connectedness and continuity of the subject matter. One team member should be charged with the responsibility of coordinating and administering the teaching effort.

Even if no team is available, interdisciplinary courses should not be abandoned. Liberally educated college teachers can go it alone if they study and take courses at local colleges to prepare them to teach a course or two at the freshman or sophomore level. Colleagues in related disciplines can serve as resource persons, and an occasional guest speaker or film can provide assistance. Capable students in the class can be called upon to assist in the interdisciplinary effort, particularly if they are well-advanced in an appropriate major field.

Conclusion

In the end, the effort required to sell an interdisciplinary program to the administration and then set it in motion will be well rewarded. Instead of seeing a broken and fragmented world, students will perceive its interconnectedness, interdependence, and wholeness—just as the Creator intended. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Thomas Munro, *Art Education* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), p. 297.

² Alden F. Megrew, "College Fine Arts Today," *College Art Journal* (Winter 1949-1950), p. 168.

³ Gene A. Mittler, "Learning to Look/Looking to Learn: A Proposed Approach to Art Appreciation at the Secondary Level," *Art Education* (March 1980), p. 17.

⁴ Robert J. Werner, "A Disciplinary Approach to Teaching the Arts," *Art Education* (September 1980), p. 17.

⁵ William H. Newell and William J. Green, "Defining and Teaching Interdisciplinary Studies," *Improving College and University Teaching* (Winter 1982), p. 29.

⁶ Here are some sample subquestions from the contributing disciplines: What were the political circumstances in Italy during the Renaissance? What role did wealth play in shaping Renaissance attitudes? What picture emerges from literature and the arts regarding the Renaissance world view? What contributions did Greece and Rome make to the Renaissance spirit? What part did religion play in

shaping the directions of the Renaissance?

⁷ William F. Newell, "Interdisciplinary Studies Are Alive and Well," *The National Honors Report* (Summer 1988), pp. 5, 6.

⁸ Newell and Green, p. 29.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Herbert Weigand, "From Science Into Art," *Art Education* (November 1985), p. 18.

¹¹ Theodore Lopushinsky, "Science for the Non-scientific: A Role for the Humanities," *Improving College and University Teaching* (Winter 1982), pp. 13-16.

¹² Paul D. Houston, "Stalking the School Administrator: Advocating the Arts," *Art Education* (September 1981), p. 19.

¹³ Ruth M. Freyberger, "Integration: Friend or Foe of Art Education?" *Art Education* (November 1985), p. 6.

A CONTEMPORARY ROLE FOR THE CAMPUS ART GALLERY

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lege campus has a unique place and opportunity in a contemporary culture. Through it the community can see us responding to the needs of present society rather than longing for the romanticism of the past. Much of contemporary art is based on "newness" and innovation. The history of art over the past century has shown us that the creations that lasted have been fresh and inventive. The large museums generally are careful about acquiring "new" works for fear that they may not stand the test of time. The college gallery can accommodate the avant-garde through its format of small shows. The role as justifier of "good" art can be put aside in favor of simple reporting. The small gallery can say, "This is what is going on. What do you think of it?"

The Seventh-day Adventist-operated gallery can say the same to its community: "This is what is going on... What do you think of us?... Are there ways we can meet and mutually benefit?"

The responses may vary from "The cider was good" to "The painting looked unfinished, but it gave me a feeling of movement;" or, "It made me uncomfortable to look at that photograph, but its subject kept drawing me back..." It made me think about my family history;" or, "I didn't know your gallery would exhibit non-Adventist artists... Can other religions come to your school?"; and, "I'm glad I came out on a cold Wednesday evening... I'm glad I met you."

If the viewer can come to an art gallery with an attitude disposed toward learning... accepting each artist and his art as a serious statement, whether it be humorous, satirical, philosophical or experimental... then the ability to appreciate and understand will be greatly

enhanced and rewarded.

If an audience can avoid having judgmental attitudes... "I like it... I don't like it... It would look good in my house... I wouldn't want it on my wall"... then enjoyment becomes paramount and criteria is expanded.

If an observer can have a willing openness to view visual statements unlike any he may have seen before... then artistic phenomena may become an accepted form in the same way new scientific and natural phenomena become understandable.

If the viewer can accept works which are not repetitions of traditional art forms or works which please a collectable nature... then he may learn something of himself as well.

The challenge of new forms does not do away with tradition.

By recognizing traditional as well as contemporary directions in art, the viewer becomes more aware how each era complements the other through the very thing that makes clear the difference... that is, the tremendous creative power with which each period is endowed. To narrowly define the ever-widening concept of art is to relegate the artist to a depersonalized form of copying and to admit that creative energies no longer exist in contemporary society. —*Mabel Bartlett Gallery Statement*. □

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The Mabel Bartlett Gallery is named for Dr. Mabel Bartlett, who founded the art department at Atlantic Union College. She died December 9, 1988, at the age of 89. Art openings at the gallery are regular events that usually attract at least 300 students and members of the community.

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¹ Kenneth M. Lansing, *Art, Artists, and Art Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973), p. 52.

² Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1957), p. 17.

³ Michael J. Parsons, *How We Understand Art* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 13.

SO YOU WANT TO PRODUCE A PLAY!

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enhancement, stress control, and creative expression.

When the student-actors bow to audience applause, they have come through a long, exciting learning process. They have learned about themselves; they have learned to depend on others

and to be dependable themselves. They have analyzed human behavior as never before. They have overcome their fears: they have risked and won!

Though school theater production is a high stress enterprise, it is an incredibly rewarding way to invest your time and energy. The results for you and your students will be well worth the time and effort expended.

Sources for Plays

Catalogues of plays are available from many publishing companies. Most collections include royalty-free plays. These are typically of fair quality but totally unknown, so what you save by not having to pay royalties you lose through poor attendance. If making money or at least breaking even is your goal, use a well-known play—*Our Town, You Can't Take It With You, The Miracle Worker*—and pay the royalties.

An excellent source of play suggestions is the National Council of Teachers of English publication, *Guide to Play Selection*. This book will solve many of your problems relating to cast size, publishers, and play analysis.

Additional sources include the following:

Bakers Plays

100 Chauncy St.
Boston, MA 02111
617/482-1280

The Dramatic Publishing Co.

86 East Randolph St.
Chicago, IL 60601

Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

440 Park Ave. South
New York, NY 10016
212/683-8960

Samuel French, Inc.

45 West 25th St.
New York, NY 10010

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

1111 Kenyon Rd.
Urbana, IL 61801

Greg Morris, *Being and Doing*

(A Workbook for Actors)

Whitehouse/Spelling Publications
8004 Fareholm Dr.
Los Angeles, CA 90046

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