

ON SATISFACTION

There are two simple truths at the heart of learning and education:

The first is that learning is an individual process; each person is responsible for their own education and it can only be achieved by their own, active, constant involvement and it takes place at each individual's own pace. It takes hard work and dedication which is only possible when a person has decided that they really want to know something; either because they need to or they have some personal feeling, believe in that particular subject.

The second is that quality arises out of sincerity and the total absorption of the self with what one is doing (this is probably one of the reasons that the work of children often shows so much quality). It also comes from setting oneself the highest standards and caring about detail.

Absorption is the mark of concentration and concentration is the secret of achieving resonance of depth in what you do. The inability to concentrate for an extended time is the biggest single problem that I encounter as a teacher.

It is not the student's fault; it is a problem of our society. We live in the age of instantaneous fulfilment; I read that the average concentration span for television is down to ten seconds and constant newness replaces extended pleasure- the momentary zap of the 'fast food burger' instead of the subtle and slowly orchestrated pleasure of the slow, social dinner.

Newness and youth are more valued than perfection and maturity; the arrogance of the modernist belief that history no longer has a place.

Subtlety is replaced with novel variety. Satisfaction is the promise of what comes next; the free give-away offered when one buys the next product. The result is a general malaise in our society and nobody quite understands why.

Yet all that is lasting in value and pleasure requires involvement, effort and a

slow revealing; patience. Satisfaction is a product of effort. The human orgasm is a brief and hardly satisfactory affair in itself. Its potency comes from it being the culmination of a wonderfully complex physical, psychological and emotional dance that might begin with a glance across a crowded room. When people began to fix the responsibility for too many things on the brief physical pleasure itself, as in the sixties anxiety tended to follow.

To understand a picture, to discover a human being, to enjoy a poem or a piece of music takes time and focus. To a certain extent it takes the laying down of one's own ego to appreciate a new perspective. There is a certain amount of giving up; you only get what you give. Take type form: to develop the experience to understand subtle differences takes time to develop a discrimination, it takes knowledge of the development and history. It takes experience and usage.

Looking is a slow and sensuous business; the longer you look the more you see and the more capable you become of seeing. Cézanne found a lifetime's looking in a handful of apples. Ah, but there is so much to see! So much to learn, so much information. Survival requires us to be mental jugglers; to assimilate and to pass on to the next thing:

"The supposed great misery of our century is the lack of time; our sense of that, not a disinterested love of science, and certainly not wisdom, is why we devote such a huge proportion of the ingenuity and income of our society to finding faster ways of doing things- as if the final aim of mankind was not to grow closer to a perfect humanity, but to a perfect lightening-flash"

John Fowles