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THE CERAMICS PROGRAM
IN THE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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In today's classroom, great emphasis is being placed on reading, arithmetic and science. Art, in many of its forms, is being grossly neglected. Yet art is the one concrete thing in which the child indulges during his school day. Art is one subject that is entirely the child's own, the only subject in which he may express himself freely. In all other subjects he deals in abstractions, in concepts of the adult world which surrounds him.

The art programs in today's schools are greatly in need of expansion if the whole child is to be educated. In art, the child's growth is aesthetic and spiritual as well as physical and mental. In many schools, the art curriculum is being expanded to include a ceramics program. The program consists of working in potter's clay, using a potter's wheel, glazing, and firing in a school-owned kiln.

Working in clay affords many satisfactions to a child. He enjoys the actual physical contact with the clay and the emotional experience of creating something entirely his own. There is great satisfaction in working in clay for children, for it is a culturally acceptable substitute for mud. As a child works in this media, the teacher watches the child unfold and begins to learn his language.

Clay work is peculiarly fitted to answer the needs of the child. It answers his physical need for manipulating and handling and developing

his large and small muscles. It satisfies his mental need by allowing him to explore the possibilities of a third dimensional art form. It satisfies him spiritually and aesthetically by building a natural bridge by which the gap between idealism and realism may be closed.

The ceramics program should be presented as part of a well-rounded art program, and not as a spare-time activity. It can easily be tailored to suit the needs of the child on all grade levels.

The teacher about to present clay work to her students does not need an elaborate outlay of equipment. She should have a supply of potter's clay, glazes, both running glaze and underglaze, a number of soft brushes, a few molds, and a kiln. A bright, cheerful place to work is also important to the program. The kiln is the most expensive of this equipment and she may have to justify it's purchase to the local school board.

First and second graders take to modeling in clay as naturally as the proverbial ducks to water. The ceramics program for this age group is at it's best when it is presented as simply as possible. The child of this age is extremely imaginative and enjoys pulling, squeezing and handling the clay.

The third or fourth grader tends to stress realism in his clay work. He stresses the practical and useful, and begins to compare his work to that of others. He is critical of his own as well as his neighbor's work. The teacher's role is one of sparking his interest and guiding and directing his activity.

Children at the fifth and sixth grade level are more self-critical,

more sensitive to difficulties and more anxious to conform to standards than younger children. This tends to inhibit their performance and the teacher's role is now one of reassurance and guidance. She should encourage the child of this age to be himself. This art medium should afford the child the opportunity to express his ideas and feelings without constraint. It is a medium in which each child can perform well. When the child is expressing himself more creatively through the medium of art, he is learning while growing.

A full, rich arts program includes painting, clay modeling, music and dance. These art forms are of paramount importance to the child, enriching his life and fulfilling the needs of his emotional, spiritual and aesthetic growth.