

Drawing On The Artist Within

Hedy Edwards
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In *Drawing on the Artist Within*, Edwards claims "if you can catch a baseball, thread a needle, or hold a pencil and sign your name, you can learn to draw skillfully, artistically and creatively" (p. 8) and, beyond that, you can think more creatively. "I believe," she says, "that one becomes more creative *not* by trying to be more creative, but rather by further developing that part of the mind, the visual, perceptual mode of the brain, which is so deeply involved in creative thinking." (p. 230)

Drawing on the Artist Within is a systematic program to teach the attentive reader skills in drawing, and to apply those skills, literally as well as metaphorically, to problem solving. At the heart of this book is the concept of drawing as a "parallel language" to the more familiar, verbal one: a language in which the drawn marks themselves, not just the images they may suggest, become vocabulary and grammar, and their placement becomes syntax. In a series of examples and exercises, Edwards constructs an effective introduction to both "reading" and "writing" this language. It's not a new idea that drawing - or any of the visual arts - has a "formal language" that must be understood to fully appreciate the work. Art appreciation teachers have been trying to teach the reading, and drawing teachers, the writing, of this language, for as long as these disciplines have existed. What Edwards adds that makes *Drawing on the Artist Within* so useful as a tool for understanding the "parallel language" concept is the "analog drawing", which allows the reader without any particular skill in drawing to understand, and produce, drawings which can be read as intelligible, non-verbal statements.

However useful the tactics for learning drawing may be, they are ancillary to the stated purpose of the book, which is to teach the reader to be more creative. The possibility of a connection between seeing perceptually "as an artist sees" and "seeing" alternative ways of looking at and solving problems was the impetus for *Drawing on the Artist Within*. It is this extension of seeing/drawing into the realm of seeing/problem-solving that distinguishes this book from the author's earlier *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. In both, the author uses theories of differences in left-brain/right-brain (referred to as L-mode and R-mode) functioning as the basis for explaining why some people "can't draw". (In questioning the usual equation of drawing ability with talent, Edwards compares drawing with reading, believing that they are equally learnable skills, and that to say "I have no talent for drawing" makes no more sense than to say "I have no talent for reading.") "In order to gain access to the subdominant visual perceptual brain mode, it is necessary to present the brain with a task that the dominant verbal analytic mode will turn down." (p. 137). She provides a series of procedures for tricking the L-mode into resigning in boredom or disgust, leaving the

field clear for the R-mode to show the reader that he/she can, in fact, draw. Many of these exercises, such as contour drawing, will be familiar to anyone who has taken a studio art class, but the process by which they work is likely to be a revelation.

The analog drawings, in which the reader is asked to make statements with lines, without images of any kind, serve not just to demonstrate the parallel language concept, but also as the bridge between drawing and creative problem solving. Edwards discusses line as we all know it in signatures, and line as artists have used it, to indicate how we can, and do, read lines. The reader is asked to produce pencil marks on paper which can serve as an analog for a particular feeling (anxiety, ecstasy, fear) and then given pages of examples of to compare with his/her completed drawing. The similarities that emerge become the basis for reading the structure. (Analog drawings for peacefulness tend to include sets of parallel lines which fill the page or are above the center, while analog drawings for depression tend to have heavy marks positioned low on the page, and analogs for anger tend to be energetic marks that dominate the page.) After doing a number of these general analog drawings, the reader is asked to produce an analog for a personally problematical situation, without any preconception of what the results will be, and without producing any images. This drawing is to be regarded as a "message from the visual, perceptual part of your mind - an R-mode perception. Your task is to apprehend the message, to *read* it." (p. 104) This "problem analog" then becomes the statement of a First Insight, (the first of the stages in Edwards' First Insight-Saturation-Incubation-Illumination-Verification model of creativity) and provides the basis for a series of manipulations and readings of the original drawing.

The major section of the book deals with the Saturation (information gathering) phase, in which five strategies are described to develop new ways of seeing. The strategies are to perceive the problem in terms of its edges, negative spaces, relationships and proportions, lights and shadows, and its Gestalt. Since the use of these strategies, "the heuristics of seeing - requires that you understand, in a real sense, the meaning of the terms . . . I believe that the most efficient way to attain that understanding is to learn to see by learning to draw." (p. 127) So, for each of the strategies, there is an appropriate drawing technique presented clearly and in detail, an indication of the problems students often encounter using the technique, and an explanation of the roles of L-mode and R-mode in dealing with these problems. The seeing skill newly developed as part of the drawing process is then applied to the problem analog to offer, literally, a new way of looking at the problem. At the end of the five strategies, the Saturation process is over.

The three final stages of the creative process are dealt with very briefly. The Incubation process is described as others have experienced it, and there are some suggestions for reviewing the mass of drawings produced thus far, but at this point, the student is basically on his/her own until the time when "driving on the freeway or standing in the shower, the answer will come from out of the blue," (p. 227) and illumination will have arrived.

Can *Drawing on the Artist Within* deliver on its claims to be able to teach anyone to draw, skillfully, artistically and creatively? And enhance creativity? Certainly, one can learn skills in perceptual drawing from this book, as well as learn ways to teach others to draw. Whether one draws artistically and creatively is probably beyond the power of this or any other book to determine. Certainly, time and attention spent on the seeing/drawing exercises will change one's way of perceiving, although the creative use of these new perceptions will be an individual matter.

The extent to which *Drawing on the Artist Within* succeeds makes it a useful guide for learning to draw, learning to draw better, learning to teach drawing, and learning to read the language of drawing. The book also provides a great deal of information about the creative process, as well as potential direct access to this process.

Diane Crane