

Art for All

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Channarong Pornrunroj
Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts
Chulalongkorn University

1. What is “Art for All”?

The philosophy of “Art for All” is to overcome physical, emotional and intellectual limitations and fulfill one’s creative potential through a process of ethical, cooperative learning and problem-solving aimed at building a better society in the future.

If we could choose the circumstances in which we are born, most of us would choose to be born with money and in good health, but nature has not allowed us the gift of choice. Instead, we are all born different. A society that recognizes our differences and appreciates them can draw a wealth of benefits from them. But a society that fails to understand and accept the differences between people is certain to face a myriad of problems. By nature we are competitive animals, and human society reflects this. To the winners in society, this fact seems hardly worth mentioning. But to a sizable number of people who are beaten in the race, the competitive nature of society is a matter of tremendous concern. When this competitiveness infects our educational system -- a system that forms the basis of society and shapes our lives, it spells disaster. Instead of making us more human, education makes us more selfish. We lose sight of the importance of moral and ethical behavior. We would do anything to win. This attitude is at the root of so many social problems that plague people all around the world today.

"Art for All" is a project that understands how harmony and beauty can be born out of human differences. Sponsored by the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University, ESCAP, the United Nations, and the Office of the National Culture Commission, "Art for All" has received funding from the National Lottery Office and, beginning in the third year, the Japan Foundation. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Channarong Pornrunroj (the author) initiated the project. It was his wish to build bridges through art between people with handicaps and those without. "Art for All" brings together the blind, the deaf, those without arms or legs, and the mentally challenged, as well as people without handicaps and the intellectually gifted, and unites them through an integrated program of visual and dramatic arts, music and literature. "Art for All" is a harmonious blending of the sciences, social sciences and the arts.

By bringing together children with differing skills and abilities, "Art for All" is an educational experience that encourages cooperation and sharing. The blind are

the ears for those who are deaf. The deaf help the blind to see. People without arms or legs are the brain for the mentally challenged, while the mentally challenged are the arms and legs for those who cannot walk. With support from someone without handicaps, they form a unit of complementary skills and abilities. Together, they illustrate the project slogan: "Five people together make one genius."

Five People Together Make One Genius

One	blind person	cannot see	but has a voice to speak.
One	deaf person	cannot hear	but has eyes to see.
One	without	arms	or legs
	still has	a brain	to think.
One	who is mentally challenged		still has
	physical strength and energy		to share.
One	non-disabled	unites	the other four.
	When the five	become one	to create,
	To complement	and compensate	for what the others lack,
	As eyes,	ears,	body and brain,
	What at first seems out of reach	comes true	in the end.

"Art for All" uses art as a medium for instilling moral and ethical principles in the young people who participate. Art is also used to stimulate the right side of their brain, where creativity and originality reside. Through a wide range of artistic activities, the young participants learn while having fun. They enjoy creating works of art in a setting of natural beauty. "Art for All" provides the children who take part with an invaluable opportunity to explore their potential and develop their creative skills. By encouraging them to make art, the project allows the children to express an essential part of their humanity -- the desire to create beauty. "Art for All" also uses art as a means of improving hand-eye coordination and other physical skills. It is a form of physical and psychological therapy that serves as an important emotional outlet and builds self-esteem.

2. Background

Committed to the belief that no one is born perfect and despite our limitations, we all have a contribution to make, Dr. Channarong Pornrungrroj, the dean of the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University, started an art program for handicapped children, which evolved into the project known as Art for All. Art for All uses art as a vehicle for developing the skills and talents of both handicapped and non-handicapped individuals. Teachers, gifted and average children, the blind, the deaf, and the physically and mentally impaired all take part in activities ranging from music and the visual and creative arts to dance, drama

and literature, and through these activities they learn about science, society and themselves. Art for All promotes humanitarian values and does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race or religion.

Art for All was initiated in 1999. In cooperation with the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University, ESCAP, and the National Culture Commission as mentioned above, the project has sponsored a series of youth camps, educational forums, exhibits, and research. In its first year, full funding was provided by the National Lottery Office. In its fourth year, the Ministry of University Affairs has agreed to contribute two million baht to the project budget, and the Council of University Presidents is lending its support for an academic seminar and workshop.

Dr. Channarong has adopted a principle he calls "Creative Cooperation of Five" as the basis for many of the activities in the Art for All project. The idea is that by bringing together five people with different types of handicaps and complementary gifts, one creative genius can be formed. For instance, the blind are the mouth and ears of the group; the deaf are the eyes. Those with impaired limbs are the brain, while those who are intellectually challenged are the group's arms and legs. The normal and gifted children help to coordinate the gifts of all the other group members. Participants in the Art for All project are encouraged to use their imagination and explore new ideas. They take part in activities designed to stimulate both hemispheres of the brain. In a natural setting of peace and beauty, the children learn from each other. The project fosters an environment that allows all participants to develop their potential through the creation of meaningful works of art. Art becomes a form of therapy and an outlet for stress and frustration. It is a channel for sharing thoughts and feelings with other human beings. At the same time, art requires the children to exercise the muscles of their hands, arms and legs, and improves their hand and eye coordination.

In the three years that the project has been in existence, a great deal has been learned about people with handicaps. Some of this knowledge has confirmed what was already believed; other knowledge has contradicted it. As "Art for All" enters its fourth year, it is clear that the handicapped people who have taken part have been teachers as much as they have been students. The questions and concerns raised by so many experts in the first year of the project about whether it was appropriate to bring handicapped and non-handicapped people together evaporated in the second year. But the questions raised in the second year were no less daunting. Just how much creative potential do the handicapped possess? And to what extent can we tap into this potential? What are the best methods for developing their creative skills? From the outset, it was generally agreed that people with certain types of handicaps could benefit from a project like "Art for All," but after three years, it has become obvious that everyone, regardless of the type of handicap they have, has creative potential, and that this potential can be developed. Whatever their physical, mental or emotional limitations, the

handicapped have resources of strength and determination that enable them to surpass their limits.

Whether we do or do not have handicaps, we are all citizens of the country into which we are born, and the strength of that country depends on the strength of its citizens. A society that overlooks its handicapped members fails to take advantage of all its resources and places itself at risk of serious social problems. Money must be set aside to meet the special needs of those who are physically and mentally challenged. In Thailand, where the United Nations estimates that up to 10% of the population is to some extent handicapped, the government has had to increase its annual budget for programs to assist the handicapped by an average of 30-40% a year. The needs of the handicapped have also been addressed in the 8th National Social and Economic Development Plan, and in the National Education Act (1999), the government has taken steps to guarantee equal rights in education for the country's handicapped children.

Equal access to education and other forms of self-improvement is especially important in a capitalist society where competition is increasingly intense and economic growth is paramount. Everyone, including the handicapped, must be given the opportunity to develop their potential to the fullest extent possible. If the handicapped are given access to education and training, they can acquire greater self-reliance and reduce their dependence on the family and on society in general. By learning marketable skills, they can contribute to the nation's economy. But before this can happen, social attitudes must change. Even though we are not handicapped now, how can we be sure that we will not be handicapped tomorrow? We must look for ways to turn handicaps into opportunities by giving greater emphasis to the development not only of our citizens' IQ but to their emotional and creative intelligence as well.

In brief, "Art for All" is a revolutionary approach to education. It is an attempt to change old ideas and sweep away old prejudices. Rather than separate children with different types of handicaps, the project unites them, in the belief that their individual gifts and abilities can complement one another. Through an integrated program of visual and dramatic arts, music and literature, the project promotes cooperative learning. It combines the sciences, social sciences and the humanities - three areas of knowledge that have traditionally been seen as worlds apart.

The project's success relies heavily on volunteers, most of whom are students and teachers from Chulalongkorn University and other educational institutions. They help to prove the truth of the project's motto: "Five people together make one genius." Finally, the project also fulfills the four main commitments of the university: to produce graduates, to conduct research, to serve society, and to promote and preserve the country's arts and culture.

Societies all around the world are blessed with a wealth of bright and capable individuals, but as the level of development varies from one country to another, so do the opportunities for these individuals to reach their potential. It is the duty of

the developed nations to reach out to those less developed states, just as it is the duty of individuals within a country to reach out to those who are less fortunate than themselves. All of us have an obligation to help other people. This is the key to our happiness. At "Art for All" we stand ready to do whatever we can to contribute to the betterment of the world's diverse human community.

When handicaps are no longer seen as obstacles to a useful life in society, we can honestly say that our society has reached another important stage in its development. But when a society has learned to appreciate the differences between its individual members and to exploit these differences for the benefit of all, then that society has taken a major step toward achieving peace, prosperity and happiness.

3. Practical approach to "Art for All"

3-1. Objectives

1. To respond to the government's policy on the handicapped as articulated in the 8th National Economic and Social Development Plan and the government's international pledge to work for equality for the handicapped, a pledge celebrated during the Asia Pacific Decade of the Handicapped (1993-2002).
2. To develop creative and artistic skills, and to instill a sense of morality in project participants.
3. To be a center where the handicapped can meet and share knowledge and experiences through participation in fun and creative activities.
4. To develop to the fullest extent possible participants' potential to care for themselves and others.

3-2. Target group

Average and gifted children, children with handicaps of all sorts, teachers, art instructors, and other educators who work with handicapped children, both in Thailand and abroad.

3-3. Participants

Children and young people of all sorts, teachers, artists, psychologists, doctors, academics, researchers and other interested persons as well as project partners from government and private sector organizations. The project welcomes both Thai and foreign participants.

3-4. Types of activities

Discussions, seminars, workshops, exhibits, national and regional youth camps, research, and publications.

3-5. Schedule of events

Youth camps generally take place mid-year. Other activities are held year-round. Specific dates are determined by the type of activity and convenience of participating organizations.

3-6. Venue

Venues change each year. The emphasis is on places of natural beauty.

3-7. Implementing Organizations

The Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts at Chulalongkorn University, the U.N. organization ESCAP, and the Office of the National Culture Commission, with financial assistance from the National Lottery Office and the Ministry of University Affairs.

3-8. Activities 1999-2004

1. Meetings/Discussions

1.1 "Special Experiences"

Held July 24, 1999, at the Revolving Exhibit Hall, Thailand Cultural Center

1.2 "Art for Special Children"

Held April 24, 2000, at the Office of the National Culture Commission

2. Academic Conferences

2.1 "The Handicapped and Artistic Creativity"

Held May 31, 2000, Saranithet Conference Hall, Chulalongkorn University

2.2 "Developing the Handicapped through Art"

Held October 12, 2001, Saranithet Conference Hall, Chulalongkorn University

2.3 "Preventing Handicaps and Caring for People with Handicaps"

Held June 11, 2002, at the Saranithet Conference Hall, Chulalongkorn University

2.4 "Able--Art for All"

Held January 10, 2004 at Saranithet Conference Hall, Chulalongkorn University

3. "Art for All" Art Camp

3.1 1st Camp, held August 23-27, 1999, at the Pung Wan Resort, Kanchanaburi

3.2 2nd Camp, held July 14-18, 2000, at the Wang Ree Resort, Nakorn Nayok

3.3 3rd Camp, held July 4-8, 2001, at Muak Lek Paradise Resort, Saraburi

3.4 4th Camp, held July 23-27, 2002, at Kaeng Krachan Resort and Country Club, Petchburi

3.5 5th Camp, held August 8-12, 2003 at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand , Muak Lek Paradise Resort, Saraburi

3.6 6th Camp, held July 30 – August 3, 2004, at at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand , Wang Ree Resort, Nakorn Nayok

The camps include the following programs:

- An Introduction to the Visual Arts
- Improving Specific Skills
- Improving the Quality of Art Instruction
- Caring for the Handicapped and Preventing Handicaps
- Developing Human Resources through Art

4. Regional “Art for All” Projects

1st Camp held on August 5, 2001, at the Maha Surasinghanat Camp, Rayong

2nd Camp held on September 2, 2001, at Banharn Jaemsai Vithaya 6 School, Supanburi

3rd Camp held on October 7, 2001, at Ban Khok Sung School, Sakaew

4th Camp, held on November 4, 2001, at Sotsuksa Cholburi School, Cholburi

5th Camp, held September 1, 2002, at Prince Songkla University

6th Camp, October 6 2003, at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai

7th Camp, held September 3, 2002, at Suksapiset School, Karasin

8th Camp, held March, 2003, at Saravisaitus, Beytong, Yala

9th Camp, held May 4, 2003, at Nadoon, Mahasarakram

10th Camp, held November 2, 2003, at Wienghang, Chiang Mai

5. Publications

- “The Process of Organizing an Art Camp”
- “Art: Seeing, Hearing, and Feeling”
- “Developing the Handicapped through Art”

6. Research: “Developing One’s Creativity”

7. Children’s and Young People’s Art Exhibits

“Power of Joy, Seeds of Growth”

November 15-25, 1999, at the United Nations Conference Center

“Freedom from Barriers”

December 12-15, 2000, at the United Nations Conference Center

“The Kindness of Friends”

December 23-28, 2000, at River City Shopping Complex

Exhibit to Mark the 84th Anniversary of the Founding of Chulalongkorn University

March 23-28, 2001, at Sala Prakiew Hall, Chulalongkorn University

Exhibit to Mark the 29th Anniversary of the Ministry of University Affairs
September 23-27, 2001, at Impact Conference and Exhibition Center, Muang
Thong Thani

Exhibit at the Seminar on Developing the Handicapped through Art
October 12-31, 2001, at the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn
University

Exhibit to Mark the Asia-Pacific Decade of the Handicapped 2001
December 10-14, 2001, in Hanoi, Vietnam

Exhibit to Mark decade of Asia-Pacific Decade of the Handicapped
October 25-25, 2003, at Otsu City, Shiga, Japan

“Able—Art for All”

January 10, 2004, at Sala Prakiew Hall, Chulalongkorn University

8. Expanding the Network

A sister project, entitled *Art for All 2*, received support from the Malaysian government and was held in Malaysia, October 25-28, 2001.

3-9. Future Directions

1. Phase One: In the initial phase, *“Art for All”* aimed to overcome barriers and limitations facing both non-handicapped and handicapped persons, including the deaf, blind, physically and intellectually challenged, as well as the gifted. Through a range of creative activities, the project fostered an atmosphere of tolerance, understanding, selflessness, and mutual caring and support among the various participants.

2. Phase Two: In the second phase, the project aimed to overcome the prejudices and conventional thinking that often limits individual creativity. University students from various academic fields ranging from the physical and and life sciences, sociology, and the humanities were introduced to new ways of thinking. They developed their individual creativity while learning ethics, tolerance, sympathy and sacrifice for those who are less privileged than themselves. They learned to place the common good before their own benefits.

3-0. Project Goals and Plans for the Future

The Project plans to continue its program of training and skills development for the handicapped. The ultimate goal is to equip them with occupational skills that will enable them to earn income for themselves and, in this way, make a contribution to society. Art for All has plans to open a gallery where works of art produced by the handicapped can be displayed and sold. There are further plans to build an international network. In 2004, for instance, ASEAN will sponsor an *Art for All Seminar and Exhibition*, bringing together representatives from the ten member countries of ASEAN. The Project is also involved in research into development of the handicapped in Thailand and the formulation of tools for measuring the creativity of different types of people.

All of these plans contribute to the fulfillment of *Art for All's* ultimate goal, namely the creation of a society free from racial, ethnic and religious prejudice, where everyone's common humanity is recognized and respected. The "*Art for All*" Project is committed to building a physical, emotional and spiritual sanctuary, which it calls the *Art for All village*, where people learn to have "*heart for all.*"





