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Creative Drama

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C R E A T I V E D R A M A

An Honors Special Study
for two hours credit

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Creative dramatics, in this paper, will be defined as a group art for children which will be treated as a separate phase from children's theatre. Children's theatre is the term given to the form of drama which exists for the purpose of the child audience. Creative dramatics is the term given to the form of drama which exists for the purpose of the child participant. Creative dramatics is not concerned with training children to become actors, nor in creating plays for an audience. It is aimed toward the development of the whole child, socially, emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. The term "creative dramatics", includes all forms of improvised drama--drama created by the children themselves and played with spontaneous dialogue and action. This begins with the imaginative (make-believe) play of the young child, which shows us life as the child sees and feels it, and is followed by simple story dramatization.

The major emphasis in creative dramatics is joy, appreciation, understanding, and expression. Experiences of sharing, feeling, thinking and of being comes from active participation in many creative dramatics experiences.

From the beginning of life, every human enjoys "play-

acting" and imitating life around him. Through mimicking life in his early years, a child learns to behave like those around him. However, the joy of imitation is often squelched in children at an early age.

Drama in modern educational and recreational programs is considered as an art in itself and is important in childhood education as such. It deals with how to develop the creative abilities of our youth at a time when society fosters conformity rather than individuality. Because of this increased emphasis in creativity and self-expression in childhood education, informal dramatics is based on the child's own free and informal play.

Creative, or informal dramatics may take many forms ranging from the simplest expression of dramatic play and dramatic games of the younger children to the dramatization and improvisations, skits and stunts of older children. Although this dramatic play may be expressed in all of these forms and in innumerable ways, all such activity seems to fall into two rather general types: (1) imitative and (2) imaginative. In general, the only audience in creative dramatics is that part of the class not playing at the moment. It is an important audience however to children above primary age for it has the responsibility of evaluating the work of the other players.

Dramatics, in order to accomplish or achieve any measurable or indicative amount of success, must be approached in a creative manner. Creativity is a process and not an academic study or a discipline. Since creativity cannot be taught, we can only set conditions for it to happen. The conditions set for developing creativity, then, become very important in the regular classroom. Under proper conditions it may become a quality possessed by every child.

Creativity itself, is defined as the ability to tap past experiences and come up with something new. Eight principles have been set up for a creative experience:

- (1) All children born creative
- (2) There is a relationship between creativity and intelligence tests.
- (3) Creativity is a form of giftedness which is not measured by current intelligence tests.
- (4) All areas of the curriculum may be used to develop creativity.
- (5) Creativity is a process and a product.
- (6) All creative processes cannot be developed at one time or in one lesson.
- (7) Creativity cannot be taught.
- (8) Excessive conformity and rigidity are true enemies of creativity.

Today interest in childrens dramatics as a tool in education, recreation, and religion is ever-increasing. Dramatics of various kinds offer many avenues for children's creative expression. Thousands of elementary teachers over the country are finding that the use of a dramatic approach in the teaching of the social sciences builds a rapport between them and their pupils. Some of them are discovering too that certain children who have never been able to quite "measure up" in other arts can win satisfying recognition in creative dramatics. Their ability to contribute something worthy in one art can change their whole attitude toward school. Through this it can be seen that it may be defined as a group activity in which meaningful experiences is acted out by the participants as they create their own dialogue and action. An added significant feature of dramatic activity is that it is indulged in willingly for itself alone. Educators have seized upon this happy fact, and have used dramatics for awakening interest in school subjects.

The individual seeking to identify himself with another person is released from self-centered preoccupations. Drama may in this way relieve repressions and inhibitions. Through dramatics a child may express his personality through independent thought and action. He is releasing his feelings and attitudes and frees himself for

independent thinking. He gains a security within himself and draw\$ upon his inner resources to express himself.

Creative dramatics is concerned with the participant and his growing ability to analyze and portray characters from imagination or literature. The greatest value to children in creative dramatics is the process itself.

There is social cooperation as children plan a scene together. There is a sharing of minds as each child expresses his ideas concerning how the play should begin and progress. Each child grows in his ability to descrimi- nate and evaluate as he participates in the discussion that comes after the scene is played each time.

Creative dramatics expressions and experiences provide many opportunitites for the development of social skills and for satisfying "mutuality" needs within the individual child. It recognizes that all children are individuals, each one with ideas that need to be expressed. In exercising their creative power, young children are artists and poets and dreamers. They speak from the heart and they say what they feel like saying and they do what they feel like doing. Theirs is an honest and sincere expression from within.

Psychologists today are inclined to believe that emotional feeling in varying degrees, pervades all thought and actions. Strong inner feelings which are so often curbed in everyday living are brought out into the open and guided into healthy channels. As children play strong and vigerous characters in the activity of creative drama.

Group activities in creative dramatics are helpful to the emotional growth of the timid, sensitive, and self-conscious child. Socio-drama can be carried on in the ordinary classroom or in practically any other physical setting, if the director or teacher can create the proper atmosphere. Some children find it easier to identify with a role if they are furnished with a single, simple stage prop. The objective is to examine a group or social problem by dramatic methods.

Dramatic activities even help to develop within the child an appreciation for beauty and children live the wonders of nature. Under the direction of a skilled leader, dramatics provides children with the opportunity to learn about beauty by seeing it, by creating it, by making it a part of their life. Children develop a sensitivity and an appreciation which is evidenced through joy. Too often the teaching of dramatics in the elementary school is confined to its interpretative function rather than its creative function. It must be remembered, however, that one of the values of dramatic play is to stimulate a child's imagination. Children enjoy dramatizing nursery rhymes, stories, and poems at an early age and most of their learning takes place in the early years through the basis of all dramatization mimicry. More and more opportunities for creative and enjoyable activities in dramatics can bring surprising and delightful results.

Some educators have already become suspicious of the words "creative" and "creativity". But, because of the rapidity of change in the modern world, education has become an increasingly difficult and engaging task. The youth of today have a need for a different kind of education than that which was adequate for their parents. Because of the dramatic impulse native to them, today's children seldom have to be urged to take part in a play. These children, in growing up today, must be encouraged to think creatively. They must be guided in building a resourcefulness within themselves. They must experience the joy of accomplishment from their own creative efforts. Everyone of these children has creative potentialities and should have many opportunities for self-expression provided. Various studies strongly indicate a need for children to express their individual thoughts and feelings in many ways. This is because children have an inner urge to act, to express themselves; an urge to get away from their own existence to be someone else for awhile.

It is an educational type of drama which invites and brings every member of a group into group action. This may be done in a very beautiful range of forms-- pantomime, movement, rhythms, puppetry, shadow play, skits, and dialogue. Any of these forms may be combined within the expression of a class as it explores the many voices through which it may speak. A satisfying experience

includes feelings and experiencing many wide and varied activities. Action and reaction are clearly expressed when children are encouraged to open imaginary doors and see something they have always wanted on the other side.

Since one of the objectives of a dramatic activity is to gradually further the child's ability to express himself, it is necessary to find out, as accurately as possible where the children are in their developmental age to provide the necessary stimulation for creative expression. Dramatic play is a natural first stage in the child's development of dramatic expression. No one has to teach dramatic play, it is a basic characteristic occurring in childgrowth. Ways to increase this natural creative power in children are:

- (1) Free play--this term generally means the same as dramatic play.
- (2) Role-playing--the acting out of a situation.
- (3) Play-therapy--Because dramatic play is a natural part of childhood growth pattern, it is used by psychologists and psychiatrists. This helps identify the cause of disturbances in a child with problems. This therapy provides a creative and positive outlet for the emotion.
- (4) Dramatics or dramatization--this term applies to the acting out of a play, usually written as a script and read or recited.

Whether dramatics is creative or not depends upon the children, the leaders, the materials presented, and the method

or techniques used. Nearly all children discover creative dramatics for themselves, but too often their playing follows the patterns and impressions they have gained from movies or from reading material of low standards. The place for young children is in creative dramatics where they will learn the process of characteristics and the mastery of the means of expression through a natural channeling of their imagination powers. While the child is busily engaged in dramatic activities, he is working with others, gaining insights and ideas, adjusting the self to the situation, and acquiring social and emotional experiences important to his living in a democracy.

Children are the world's freest creators. After a group of children have been introduced to creative playing and a good foundation has been laid in which every child has experiences and enjoyed being many different characters the group is ready for experiences in real creative drama. The leader will always keep the experience within the child's level of interest.

"To be" characterizes seven-, eight-, and nine-year-old boys and girls. Since rhythm comes from movement and both are basic in the art of drama, challenging and satisfying experiences in creative dramatics can be found in rhythmic dramatic activity.

Although every child is an individual in his own right the young child may well be called a child of action. His world at this time is a very real world, with his interests closely related to real people and real things. The young child lives close to beauty and nature, much closer than we sometimes think. He likes the wind and the way it smells, he likes the rain and the snow and he wonders about the sun, the moon and the stars.

If the leader really understands young children, dramatic play will seldom be used for putting on a show but simply to provide an opportunity for the children doing something which is interesting and worthwhile for themselves. Before a leader meets a group of little children whom she hasn't seen before, she will find it helpful to consider a time just what it is to be like a five or six year old child.

In working with young children, a leader begins with the simplest of rhythms and movements. She proceeds rather gradually to dramatic play and after several weeks guides the children to the place where they are ready to create a play from a verse in a story. Beginning experiences will always be kept simple and will provide for a variety of large bodily actions. Day after day a leader will provide dramatic play experiences which will grow out of the children's interests and activities. A leader will use care in not having primary groups spend too long a time in planning, for little children are naturally active.

The first requisite to encouraging dramatic play is in setting conditions through the proper environmental equipment and climate both in and out of school. A leader considers the children, and she considers the material and then she attempts to find a natural way of bringing the ways of the two together. Stirring a child's imagination and arousing his curiosity are the first important factors in leading him into creative dramatic experience. Variety and delight are vital considerations in planning a good motivation. Before a child can start to play a verse he always pantomimes the main characters in order that they will understand them better.

Much of the dramatic play in the primary grades should be natural. In the classroom, children should be granted free time and the necessary environment to act out situations which are important to them. Children show their love for dramatization by carrying on long conversations with imaginary characters. Many readers have adaptations of folk tales. When children discover such a story, the appreciation of good literature may be nourished by the telling of the original which has the elements needed for dramatization. Creative plays may be developed from a poem, a riddle, and object, an article, or an experience

from reality. Happenings from everyday life have great value for many groups in children when they are relived through dramatic playing. New situations which the child is going to encounter are spring boards for satisfying creative expressions. Simple rhythmic experiences, such as jumping with make-believe jump ropes, bouncing make-believe balls, and rowing make-believe boats will be used in the very beginning. Quiet playing many times brings a deeper aesthetic experience than many leaders may realize until they see how eager children are to return to an experience which has been particularly beautiful and soul-stirring.

Evaluation and praise and encouragement can come from the boys and girls themselves. In evaluating their creative plays, children learn to give criticism fairly and in turn to accept criticism kindly. When a child is praised for contributing an idea or for creating a character exceptionally well, he gradually develops a actual faith in his own creative efforts. He gains a security within himself and feels free to express himself. Hence, a leader should always praise the children for what they have done and encourages them to play the same material many times, for as the children become acquainted with the character, they enjoy speaking for them. Evaluation is vitally important in the process of creative drama, for only by

learning to evaluate their efforts fairly will children be able to get fine and worthy results in the plays they create.

The three basic requirements for an effective creative dramatics program consist of a group of children and a space large enough for the children to move about freely, a leader who understands the philosophy and technique of creative dramatics as stimuli for the development of a well-integrated child.

For children to become independent, free and creative takes the constant labor of responsible parents, teachers and recreators. They should provide, as far as possible, an environment that will be flexible enough for children to explore and express themselves in dramatic play and release their creative abilities. Creativity and self-expression will develop only as far and as fast as children can acquire experience and express this experience in terms of their environment.

In my personal experiences with creative dramatics, I find the experiences to be fully rewarding and satisfying. As one of my teaching projects during my current student teaching experience, I decided to use weekly periods of creative dramatics. Included with this paper are pictures of the children (six-seven years old), in the midst of their own creating experience. They were such things as mushrooms, feathers, marshmallows, as small as possible, as

large as possible. They were animals, they were happy, sad, and angry. The children in the class who were the most assured of themselves in all other areas of curriculum were the least creative, while the children who have so much difficulty in all other school work seemed to blossom before my very eyes. Now I know first hand that creative dramatics does work, and not only for the advantaged child, but it greatly benefits the disadvantaged child as well. So in conclusion, I would say to "PUSH BACK THOSE DESKS, TEACHERS AND CREATE!"

IDEAS FOR CREATIVE DRAMATICS

1. Be an animal.
2. Be a postman, a policeman, a doctor or a nurse.
3. dramatize the bus ride to school
4. dramatize light things such as air, marshmallows, kleenex, feathers, dust
5. dramatize heavy things such as bulldozers, iron, mud, stones.
6. dramatize moving things such as trains, planes, or a lawnmower
7. dramatize quiet things such as a statue, a rabbit, or a librarian.
8. dramatize fast things a race car, a snake, or a waterfall.
9. dramatize noisy things like an eggbeater, a lawnmower, and a motor boat.
10. dramatize stories
11. dramatize nursery rhymes
12. Use shadow plays
13. Use puppets
14. pantomime animals, people and objects
15. make yourself as small as possible
16. make yourself as tall as possible
17. make yourself as round as possible
18. make yourself as quiet or as noisy as possible
19. Show surprise, happiness, or sadness
20. Pretend that you are green, orange, or purple

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