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A PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN--
CREATIVE DRAMATICS

Presented to
Mr. Dennis Holt
Ouachita Baptist University

In Fulfillment of
the requirements for the course
Honors Special Studies (490)

By
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A PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN--
CREATIVE DRAMATICS

A child needs beauty and love every bit as much as he needs food and exercise. He needs quiet just as he needs laughter and shouting. He needs to be alone just as he needs to be with others. He needs to work as well as to play. All components of growth are equally important if he is to develop a wholeness of personality. For a child to live is quite a different thing than for him to exist. He needs to be guided in his growing so he reaches for his best. He needs to find his way to enjoy and contribute to the world in which he lives.

One of the most significant trends in recent years to insure that these above-mentioned basic needs of a child are fulfilled is the emphasis on creative arts for children. Creative arts experiences definitely contribute to freedom of growth and personality development. Viktor Lowenfeld, a leader in this field, explains the underlying reason for this educational trend: "If children developed without any interference from the outside world, no special stimulation for their creative work would be necessary. Every child

would use his deeply rooted creative impulse without inhibition, confident in his own kind of expression... What civilization has buried we must try to regain by creating the natural base necessary for such free creation."

Educators and child psychologists recognize the need for experiences in childhood that strengthen a child's sensibilities and encourage strong expression. It is because of this underlying need that art (creative dramatics) education is being included in school and community programs with renewed stress. The importance of guiding children into cultural experiences is vital if boys and girls are to appreciate, experience, and create beauty. When art experiences are woven into a child's school program they help him acquire a philosophy of living while he is gaining knowledge and discipline in skills. The two must go hand in hand.

Creative dramatics is an art for children. It can be defined as a group experience in which every child is guided to express himself as he works and plays with others for the joy of creating improvised drama. Improvised drama means children create drama extemporaneously. They create characters, action, and dialogue as they are guided by a leader to think, feel, and become involved in the issue at hand.

In creative dramatics the children do not use scripts. The medium through which a child expresses is his whole self in relationship to other people and ideas. The idea from which children create may be a verse, experience, or a story. These may come from literature, from life, or from children's imaginings. Children are guided into planning, playing, and evaluating for the pleasure and joy of creating together. Becoming involved in his creating allows a child to speak freely for a character as he expresses himself.

There is neither a need nor a place for scenery, costumes, lights, properties, make-up, or a stage in creative dramatics. Perhaps every now and then a property or a lighting effect may be used to motivate or heighten a mood. The children are guided to use their imaginations to create illusions. Creative thinking is always being encouraged; it is not being limited by the use of paper crowns or improvised costumes. The challenge of imagining, and describing settings and costumes is enjoyed by the children. Creating illusions with the furniture on hand such as chairs, tables, benches, or whatever happens to be available within a room is great fun.

The only desirable audiences in creative dramatics is a part of the group chosen to enjoy, appreciate, and evaluate the playing. Thus, there is no formal audience. An audience situation tends to divide the thinking of a children's group, for some of the individuals become more interested in the audience than in the play they are creating. Therefore, a child does not create, for he is not wholeheartedly involved. Inhibition of even a single child can impair the creativity of the group. Whenever group spirit weakens it not only lessens creative expression, but it misleads an audience by the impressions they receive. Also an audience may tend to laugh when children become doors, trees, wind, or whatever and this laughter is often misunderstood by the children creating, and illusions are broken. It must be remembered that a creative experience is seldom the same with an audience as it is when children are entirely free from the emotional presence of others.

There are four basic requirements for the art of creative dramatics: (1) group of children; (2) a qualified leader or teacher; (3) a space large enough for children to move about freely; and (4) an idea from which to create. Participation is emphasized rather than product with the chief objective being experience--experience that foster child growth and

development. The way in which a child expresses himself provides a gauge of his development and reveals his needs. Thus this art encourages the growth of individual spirit in a group plus it provides for self-realization and cooperation in an atmosphere of spirited group play.

Among the values most evident in contributing to child growth and personality development are the following:

(1) Develops confidence and creative expression - freedom for an individual is a relationship between himself and others. A child is given many opportunities to develop confidence and use his creative powers by expressing himself in group discussion when planning, playing, and in times he praises or evaluates others. Gradually he learns to enjoy rather than fear the opportunity to stand up and share his ideas, opinions, and views. (2) Develops social attitudes and relationships - Creative dramatics calls for teamwork and requires cooperation in planning, playing, and evaluating. It provides a play situation where children experience basic rules in living with others. They learn to take turns, respect one another, and avoid interruptions. Opportunities to be both a leader and a member of a group working together are given. Children learn how to relate to one another as they learn to communicate thoughts and feelings in group experiences.

(3) Develops emotional stability - Drama deals with emotion and the real purpose of emotion is to guide and inspire right conduct. In creative dramatics children's emotions are exercised when they become both good and evil characters. They learn to release emotions in a healthy way when involved in exciting story conflicts. Good literature is concerned with strong truths of living. Thus when children experience good literature in creative dramatics they often release feelings and attitudes that have been bottled up inside. The children, in doing so, gradually gain an understanding of desirable and undesirable motives in relationship to living.

(4) Develops bodily coordination - A child's body is the medium through which he creates. In experiencing many different experiences a child releases energies and gradually develops coordination and poise.

(5) Contributes toward a philosophy of living - A child's awareness is stimulated by creative dramatics causing him to learn to look and listen, and from this to see, hear, and feel. It strengthens his sensibilities and builds a receptiveness to the world that surrounds him--the world of people, nature, things--to moods, beauties, wonderings.

A child's awareness and thinking are sharpened by limiting his expression to a single word or a single thought which paints a clear picture of his impression. This type of awareness is developed through the senses--sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing.

A good creative leader is forever becoming. She strives steadily to strengthen qualities and skills that contribute to the inspiration and effectiveness of her teaching. Leaders who consistently guide children into satisfying creative experiences are characterized by many fine qualities, three of which stand out most strongly--imagination, spirit, and greatness. (1) Imagination - She finds an imaginative way to awaken the magic in others, which is the secret of creative teaching and living. She searches with a creative attitude of mind until she finds an imaginative way to reach children. A leader with imagination always recognizes beauty in simplicity and is aware and resourceful. An imaginative leader is resourceful in finding creative ways to reach individual children and in meeting unexpected and unusual situations which frequently present themselves in creative arts experiences. A good leader strengthens her imagination by using it. (2) Spirit - It is a leader's

spirit that gives current, force, and a feeling of sailing forward to a creative dramatics experience. Spirit is enthusiasm. Whenever spirit is missing, an experience fails to become creative. A leader's spirit may be characterized by physical vitality, but even more by emotional vitality, radiance, aliveness, intensity, and faith. Spirit is as intangible as the sunshine of sunshine. (3) Greatness - A Good creative leader is characterized by intangible qualities of greatness--it lies in the total of little everyday things. A leader teaches children by example--her influence on children is strong. A significant way in which a leader achieves greatness is through a steady development of courage and faith.

A good creative dramatics leader is like a builder. She works ahead of her youthful creators in a way not unlike grandmother and the pioneers. She selects material with an eye and a yen for satisfying children's needs. Each experience has a specific goal which is to meet the strongest needs of a group through a specific form of satisfying dramatic expression. Therefore, through a steady emphasis on basic dramatic elements children are gradually introduced to the fundamentals of drama.

Material must be wisely chosen. Material is the vehicle that arouses individual expression and causes creativity to assert itself. Material for beginning and early experiences is generally based on an idea, and experience or life which stimulate expression in rhythmic movement. Rhythm is the basis for expression in all the arts, and it starts with the individual. Rhythmic action material should be limited to a single idea. It should be an idea which leads to active expression. Simplicity is the keyword in selecting material.

Creative dramatics entails and involves many ideas, thoughts, and values. It is a most rewarding and beneficial program for all those involved and included in it. Creative dramatics is definitely an art for children and a very important and vital one.