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MOTIVATION TO CREATIVITY:
RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER

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by
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MOTIVATION TO CREATIVITY:

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ELEMENTARY TEACHER

The purpose of this paper shall be to explore the nature and characteristics of creativity and to try to understand what atmosphere and discipline best motivates children to be creative.

Creativity has been termed synonymous with inventiveness, imagination, and originality. In the educational viewpoint, there are other, more complete ways to define this word. Creative teaching once meant correlating art, music, writing or dramatics with other subjects. Now, however, it has been expanded to cover more than in the past. Merse and Winge discuss creativity as "seeing or expressing new relationships."¹ In this sense, in almost anything man does, he can shift old relationships into new forms. Every time a person solves a problem, he is being creative. Where habits will not work, something new must be added. Every idea or expression that is original for the creator is an example of creativity no matter how many times others may have had a similar idea or made a similar expression.

¹William G. Merse, and G. M. Winge, Psychology and Teaching (Chicago: Scott Foresman and Company, 1962), p. 218.

Creative learning is changing ways of thinking, feeling, and doing through a process of inquiry and exploration, a looking for relationships and implications; it is "an imaging, a relating to things known, an assigning of value."¹ Thus, it means learning not a set response, but a way of appraising and dealing with new situations on the basis of their unique characteristics and requirements.

In his book, Creativity and the Individual, Issac Stein states that "the creative process is defined as the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other."² So we see that more and more the need for recognizing these new relationships will be apparent in our attempts to cope with our world of changes that need understanding and problems that need solutions. The teacher's job will be to help his student to prepare for this world by helping him produce something new--a new arrangement of old elements, or a new form completely--and in so doing, contribute to it.

In order to really understand what creativity is, perhaps it would be good to study some of the characteristics of the creative person. The mind of an imaginative

¹ Ibid., p. 219.

² Morris I. Stein and Shirley J. Heinze, Creativity and the Individual (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960), p. 201.

and inventive person is like a floodlight. It "expands perceptions, breaks down categories, and permits new insights and appreciations to occur."¹ One striking quality of creative people is that they are rarely aware of their limitations.² People who are creative have a special capacity, but are not necessarily tremendously gifted with ability. Several investigations have pointed out that creativity is not the same thing as brightness. There is a positive correlation between the two, but it is low. It has been discovered that creative children, as compared with high IQ, uncreative children, tend to be more independent, more imaginative, less conforming, less respectful of authority, and interestingly enough, less liked by their teachers.³

Dr. F. Barron described some traits that are typical of creative people in "The Psychology of Imagination," which appeared in Scientific American. He lists the following characteristics:

- (1) ability to keep many ideas in focus at one time.
- (2) independence of judgement
- (3) preference for complex phenomena
- (4) self-assertiveness
- (5) ability to integrate diverse elements

¹S. Krippner, "Ten Commandments That Block Creativity," Education Digest, January, 1968, p.25.

²S. School, "Cultivation of Creativity," Peabody Journal of Education, March, 1967, p. 284.

³Morse and Wingo, loc. cit.

(7) what might be termed "having mere unconscious material readily available." (This last condition refers to a lack of inhibition and a freedom of fantasy with rich and varied associations.)¹

Certain experiences accompanying creativity can be described. These include (a) the "Eureka feeling," (b) the anxiety of separateness, stemming from having ventured into new areas alone; and (c) the desire to communicate the discovery to others.² It is important that children not be afraid to experience this sense of elation, that they go ahead and be separate in order to explore new areas, and that they be allowed the pleasure of explaining their discoveries to the people around them.

These highly creative people are likely to be highly emotional people because access to their personal feelings is one trait that enables them to be imaginative.³ Therefore, these sensitive natures must be encouraged to feel free to explore and manipulate the environment.

Though hints as to the type of atmosphere that is needed for stimulating creativity have been made, none have been outlined specifically. Let us look at some of these requisites.

¹ P. J. Barron, "The Psychology of Imagination," Scientific American, Vol. 199, 1958, p. 4.

² Stein and Heinze, loc. cit.

³ Krippner, loc. cit.

In the classroom, creativity can be fostered by the establishment of psychological safety and psychological freedom. Psychological safety is established by accepting the individual as of unconditional worth, providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent, and understanding empathetically. Psychological freedom is accomplished through absence of restraints on symbolic freedom.¹ We must ask what we can do to provide an atmosphere of freedom within the scope and dimension of law needed for creative imaginative expression. To provide this atmosphere, education must stand at the forefront of open communication between the assenters and dissenters.² Essential for any "creative unfolding" is a relaxed atmosphere, in which children will feel free to express themselves and communicate, when such communication is important for the exchange of ideas. One of the important contributions of classroom learning consists of the free interchanging of thoughts of the dynamics which develop in group activities; if this freedom is thwarted, creative activity will not thrive.³ Thus, criticism is ruled out, freewheeling is welcomed, quantity is wanted, and combination and improvement are sought.

¹Stead and Heinze, op. cit., p. 202.

²J. van Patten, "Case for Individual Man in the Educational Environment," The School and Society. April 1, 1967, p. 233.

³Viktor Lowenfeld, Creative and Mental Growth (New York: McMillian Company, 1957), p. 83.

Creative teaching involves schemes of pupil-teacher and individualized instruction, with greatly altered roles for both teacher and learner. One aspect of the teacher role that might possibly be altered is in her approach to discipline.

Creative teaching makes use of "self-discipline," the discipline that grows out of the understanding of the situation and the desire to relate one's self to it, and not out of force. However, adhering to the principle of self discipline under any circumstances would be as wrong as using "forced discipline," the discipline which is brought about by external rules, by force, or other means of punishment. It is very important to note that in any classroom situation, the "principle of extending the frame of reference," that is, starting with the given situation and environment and gradually changing from there on, should be applied. One cannot suddenly just establish self-discipline in a situation which lacks completely the understanding of and readiness for it. The education to self-discipline is a long and slow process, especially in the environment of rigid discipline. If self-discipline is not understood and appreciated, chaos will soon result in the classroom. In chaos, no learning is possible.¹ So it is possible to see that if a teacher in a new school is faced with a situation of rigid discipline, she must initially continue this type of discipline.

¹ Ibid.

For, once she has established it, she can more easily, with educational means move on from there. The first contact with children is very decisive for later conduct. Therefore, the first motivation must be given with the full attention of all children. It must not be started if even one child is not with the teacher. The greater this initial contact, the easier it will be for the teacher to "ease-up" the atmosphere. It will then become apparent that it is "more important for children to appreciate and practice self-control than to be controlled by an adult authority figure."¹

Although the teacher's attitude toward classroom discipline is important, there are other positive ways the teacher can increase creativity. We have already covered the idea that a child becomes less inhibited in an encouraging climate. The teacher should stimulate habits of questioning orthodoxy, demanding evidence, trying new or testing the old, and observing what happens.² Another way of motivating creativity comes by placing a value on variety. When originality is extolled and encouraged, it is usually forthcoming. Discovering and developing uniqueness is a major goal not to be thwarted by ignoring or minimizing differences.³ When differences

¹P. Anzalene and D. Stahl, "Strategies for Creative Teaching," The Instructor, May, 1967, p. 17.

²Ellis P. Torrance, Rewarding Creative Behavior (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 255.

³Anzalene and Stahl, op. cit., p. 17.

of opinion and expression are valued and students are encouraged to evaluate and interpret rather than merely learn and recall, they expect differences and are not afraid to be different. Both teacher and classmates must value and give approval for originality and heterogeneity if creativity is to be encouraged.

The teacher must also encourage creative perceiving, for to be creative in expression, one must be creative in looking and listening. The creative person, besides receiving and registering impressions, actively scans the field, examines, analyzes, interprets, evaluates key elements, toys with different arrangements, and visualizes changes in given parts. This is a sort of intellectual "screening."

Teaching productive thinking and evaluation is also essential. Activities can be structured so as to induce more productive thinking and evaluation. The teacher may call for convergent thinking by asking pupils to go beyond the facts given to draw conclusions or point out implications. He might call for divergent thinking by asking what might have been some of the consequences if a certain event had not taken place, or for evaluative thinking by asking whether another course of action would have been more profitable.

A final important motivational method would be the encouragement of self-trust. Pupils must have confidence and respect for their own ideas and ~~deliberate~~ effort to reduce the awe of "masterpieces" that too often cause pupils to accept a thing as great without

a genuine personal reaction to it must be made. Perhaps the teacher might give the student an opportunity to use his own ideas and creative solutions by creating emergencies or necessities for creative thinking.

Now that we have seen what the teacher can do to make an atmosphere favorable for creativity, perhaps it would be good to see what factors might cause inhibitions in creativity.

It is surprising that studies by many professional educators show that American parents and teachers do not usually want a creative child in the family or the classroom. As a result, creative boys and girls often renounce, suppress, or redirect their drives and impulses to bring their behavior into conformity with what their teachers, parents, and even peers seem to prefer. Children may learn cultural values so completely that they also begin to criticize divergent, independent, and imaginative behavior among their classmates.

Krippner, in the Education Digest tells us of "Ten Commandments That Block Creativity." These are as follows:

- "Everything thou doest must be successful."
- "Everything thou doest must be useful."
- "Everything thou doest must be perfect."
- "Everyone thou knowest must be like thee."
- "Thou shalt not prefer solitude to togetherness."
- "Remember concentrated attention and keep it holy."
- "Thou shalt not diverge from culturally-imposed sex norms."
- "Thou shalt not express excessive emotional feelings."
- "Thou shalt not be ambiguous."
- "Thou shalt not reck the cultural beat."¹

¹Krippner, loc. cit.

These commandments, though not actually spoken, are often characteristic of our attitudes in teaching children.

The elementary teacher must seek to avoid providing the source of inhibition for her children by stepping over cultural fences and allowing freedom in her classroom.

In conclusion, we might say that there are many patterns of learning and no one teaching method meets the varying needs of all children. It is vitally important to provide alternatives in the educational program. We must realize that the teacher cannot tell the child how to think, but must provide him with the freedom, the encouragement, and the opportunity to do so. Learning must be considered an active, not a passive, process and must involve participation in a task rather than mere absorption of information. Thus, we can see that teacher motivation is very important in helping children to be creative.

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