

# The Ability To Create

ARNE W. RANDALL

Experiences in the creative arts often lead children to an improved adjustment to the school program. This article suggests other rich benefits to be derived through such opportunities for imaginative and artistic expression.

**E**VERY child possesses some ability to create and has instinctive confidence in his skill. The primitive child had more opportunities to express himself through his senses with fewer inhibitions than does the child in modern civilized society. Formal education and other innumerable social and physical adult restrictions of modern living tend to destroy this inherent birthright of our children. It is our duty, therefore, as parents and teachers, to help each child retain and develop his natural urge to create, help him become sensitive to the beauty in everyday life, and in other ways aid him in the development of wholesome personality.

## New versus Old Methods in the Creative Arts

Educators have concluded that broad creative art experiences form part of the total teaching and learning program. We should, therefore, consider with utmost care the need for increasing the time devoted to the arts.

The old step-by-step method of "teaching art" does not coincide with the child's natural creative instincts. Through this method the adult was likely to impose his feelings on the child. As a result, a pupil became increasingly dependent upon the teacher for his decisions. Since he was not permitted to express himself freely he soon

became unduly conscious of technical limitations and too much limited by unnatural adherence to adult standards. These barriers often led to frustrations and a thwarted personality. The child who was expected to copy and imitate was not able to adjust readily to new situations. He often submitted too obediently to the dictates of others, thus further handicapping himself for creative thinking or democratic behavior.

Educators now believe that every child can create in some form and that with guidance and stimulation he can enjoy a variety of creative activities. Through creative activity he enjoys an experience in living. What he puts down on the paper may not be a record of the experience, but merely activity expressed through an art medium. To one first grader, for example, swirls of paint on paper were a boat moving on some waves.

Any type of education can be enjoyable when it involves learning by doing. It is much more effective than the controlled learning methods which we knew in the past. When children are not allowed to express themselves creatively as needed, they suffer emotionally just as much as they would from physical cruelty. If children are urged to do something completely unfamiliar to them, if they are forced to

do something which they feel unable to accomplish, or if they are criticized for not being able to produce a piece of work which meets an expected adult standard, we can rest assured that behavior problems will develop, such as lack of confidence, inferiority complexes and a complete loss of interest in art.

The essentials, skill and content subjects, in education should be provided. However, the accepted need for the skill and content subjects and the obvious values of more art in the curriculum can never be harmoniously balanced until every person who is even remotely involved in education has had an opportunity to participate in the total school planning, perhaps only after the

---

*Arne W. Randall is specialist in fine arts, U. S. Office of Education, Federal Security Agency, Washington, D. C.*

---

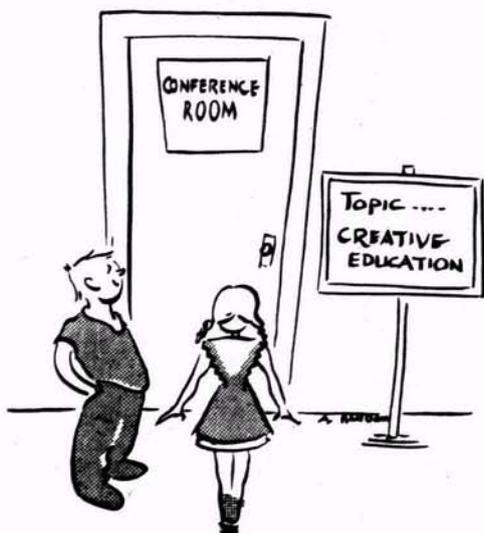
planners experience the tremendous scope of all the arts as an influencing factor in developing desirable attitudes toward learning.

Program planners should themselves have had broad creative experiences. An administrator who has never had the satisfaction of expressing himself through any one of the arts will actually never know what a natural inclusion the arts are in education. A patron of the school who, in his youth, suffered through the more traditional skill and content subjects usually continues to misinterpret the happy learning that his child enjoys when creative



Courtesy, Richmond, Va., Public Schools

**EXCITING** creations develop as children work on a paper menagerie.



"I WONDER when they'll get through with this stage?"

expression is such a natural part of his learning experiences. Actually to many average mature adults of today a broad creative program may be just as remote a phase in his learning experience as a modern washing machine would be to a Bedouin in the African desert.

The elementary school teacher ordinarily is selected for his knowledge of the content and skill subjects and not for his ability in the arts. During his teacher training days the creative aspects of teaching and learning too frequently are dealt with theoretically. Creative teaching should be experienced by the trainee in order that he may fully employ this method with his own students.

### **How Can a Creative Art Program Be Achieved?**

Probably the most important single element in the success of a classroom program is warm teacher-child relationship. The teacher will want the con-

fidence and the feeling of security of his children.

An experimental period is necessary when a new medium or activity is introduced. When a new form of art such as drawing, painting, finger painting or other art medium is to be presented to the class, it is wise to let the children discover and experiment with the materials to be used. In other words, it is well to provide a free experimental period before encouraging the child to produce something specific. In the better schools today, prepared outlines and patterns to be colored, traced or copied have virtually been eliminated. While it is felt that children should be given plenty of freedom and flexibility in carrying out their creative work, it is also true that they will miss a valuable part of their education if they are not properly guided. The teacher must know when to participate in a child's activity, when to guide him and when to leave him alone. It is not the role of the teacher to superimpose his ideas on a child, but to discover what the child's ideas are and help him carry them out. Art is the one activity or means of communication in which every child can participate; even the blind child may find expression in a piece of clay.

A broad variety of materials is necessary so that each child may find his medium of expression. A resourceful art teacher can use inexpensive and waste materials which are always available and which often lend themselves to interesting work in the crafts. By fostering the ingenuity of children to the fullest, a teacher may help them learn to improvise and utilize the ma-

materials at hand. These aesthetic experiences will very likely carry over into adult life. Homes will be made more attractive and comfortable. People will dress themselves and their families more attractively. Their recreation will very probably include appreciation of music, painting and sculpture.

Displays should include work from every child. Exhibiting only the "best" that the child or a class has produced is considered psychologically an unsound practice. The drawing that the child has made is not a product to be interpreted in the adult concept any more than is a recording of a child's humming when he is happy. Since art is an activity it should be interpreted as such. Children enjoy showing how they do it by demonstrating the use of their materials on back-to-school night.

Through the art program, an appreciation of the work of artists and craftsmen should be developed. Visits to museums, art centers, parks, industries may lead to this. Through this means children may develop an appreciation of nature and of man-made things.

At the elementary level an integrated program has helped both children and teachers. Children express themselves creatively through many activities such as writing, music, dance, drawing or painting quite naturally. The fantasies that a child may enthusiastically describe need not be labeled as a dramatic performance, but the freedom of expression with which the teacher allows the child to tell his story may be equal to a year of formal practice in dramatics.

Formalization in an art program

should be avoided. It will produce the same sterile adult reflections in an art program as in an academic "Three R's" program. Half an hour of pattern coloring on Friday afternoon may be just as frustrating as no art at all.

It is essential that the appropriate type of encouragement be given in providing creative activities at a specific age level. Everyone dealing with children, both parents and teachers, must have a clear understanding of the various stages of development through which the child will go. It is unlikely that a six-year-old child will paint the same kind of picture of his mother as would an adult. An adult's drawing might attempt, for instance, to portray the mother photographically with proportionate size, proper style of dress and coloring. Most six-year-old children would visualize only the head, arms and legs or those parts of the body that are important at that time to the child. An eight-year-old child would be aware of a greater number of details.

It is important for the teacher to know the range of results he expects to obtain when he introduces class and individual activities. In planning it is advisable for the teacher to create favorable mental attitudes and then plan with the children the specific details, the materials and equipment to be used.

As teachers begin to work with children rather than with subject matter, the children's natural expressions will transcend the barriers of labeled subjects and their new attitudes will give both the teacher and the learner a new sense of security. In a creative activity, as in no other, a child reveals his true

feelings, or frustrations, or inner self. A good teacher will take every opportunity to understand a child through his art expressions. A conscientious teacher will likewise help the parents understand what and how he is attempting to teach the children.

### **Benefits Derived from the Creative Arts Program**

#### *Emotional Release*

Self-expression in art is an emotional outlet. A child expressing himself in art gives release to one or more of these outlets, which may be intellectual, emotional, social, perceptual, physical, aesthetic or creative growth. Art education can be as much a part of growth and development as can any other subject matter area. A student who is encouraged to use his own initiative in the thinking and designing of all his creative activities will express his true thoughts and abilities even though the finished product may not always turn out as the adult would like to see it.

By learning to express himself easily through any of the means of communication, be it through dance or music, graphic or spatial presentation, or whether through oral or written means, the student will gain along with his past experiences, enough stability and self-confidence to be able to face with less difficulty the many emotional or mental problems which may confront him. Art can become an outlet and a means of adjustment and expression in such a way as to help counteract the tensions, fears, and confusions of our present day world.

#### *Skill*

There is a correlation between skill and interest. Children's art usually has

a story back of it. Normally children are eager to tell about the many things that are of interest to them. These may be pleasant or unpleasant experiences. By becoming absorbed in his tasks a child increases his skill in the arts and crafts. He cannot become proficient in skills if he is doing something he does not enjoy doing.

#### *Opportunities For Children To Learn To Think*

Art can help children to learn to think. A group of children who have experienced the thrill of writing their own play, providing intermission music, composing a musical, planning the staging, calculating the amount of materials needed for the costuming, and preparing refreshments for the parents to whom they sent their own invitations can sense an intensely greater pride in their *own work* than do those children whose efforts are directed by a "professional."

Parents also point with pride to the broad responsibilities their child has had and how he has been able to think for himself as he actively participates in everything. In such work, parents and teachers must agree whether they want a production based on adult standards or to allow their children to have a rich learning experience at the level of the best standards they themselves can formulate as they think through their problems.

#### *Lasting Interests*

There is a proportionate relationship between simple childish play and continued interest in the activity into higher education and into adulthood. Children, for example, who have made their own primitive instruments out of

readily available materials and who play these instruments with a group of congenial friends find, in many instances, lasting interest in music. Some learn to play regular band and orchestral instruments. Others develop appreciation of music that continues through life. Other activities developed creatively also tend to result in lasting interests and benefits.

### *Happy Living Experiences*

There is certain morale value in of "The Chambered Nautilus" by Tuesday" can be challenged if it leads no further than merely saying words. But if the children discuss, study, understand and interpret their own feelings about a real cockleshell, they will develop broader learning interests. They may want to learn mariners' songs, create their own sea chantey, or learn to write a poem and then study the fine points of other similar poems that might have been written by other children or great poets. Encouraging children to live as many of their experiences as possible fosters happy learning situations.

### *Improvement of Morale*

There is certain morale value in children's working creatively in groups. Composing poetry, writing the lyrics of their own songs or painting their own stage backdrop can contribute to security and add to personality growth. In a happy learning atmosphere where work can be done spontaneously, children's learning will be unrestrained, free and happy. It is not so much obtaining specific results as it is the development of attitudes that counts. By improving children's feelings towards



"ASK him if he paints this way because it is the 'Inherent birthright of all people to provide for their emotional, physical, social, intellectual and aesthetic growth?'"

themselves and their school, a teacher develops confident individuals who are free to learn and work creatively.

### *Therapeutic Value*

The arts help the teacher gain a better understanding of children. The arts also help children in their adjustment to school situations. A child who is frustrated can sometimes adjust himself through free or creative use of art materials so that he can return to the routine classroom situation sufficiently relieved to continue as the "normal" individual he is expected to be.

In our hospitals the therapeutic value of the arts has long been recognized in varying degrees. It is to be expected that an alert school will also discover and use the therapeutic value of art.

Copyright © 1952 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.