

Classroom Climate

Can Promote Creativeness

This article explores several aspects of creativeness, suggests basic concerns and raises fundamental questions. It applies to any classroom from the first grade through the university.

FOR THE PAST fifty years peoples all over the world have become increasingly aware of their creative origin and self development. This new insight has to some degree affected all cultures; the schools to a greater extent than other institutions. It has been more favorably received and encouraged by educators in this country than abroad. Yet there are strong differences of opinion as to its validity, meaning, and use. The questions raised are: Do all persons or only a few create? Should all persons or only a few be allowed to create? In what areas should this permissiveness be granted? What will be the effect upon the culture if more persons do create?

All Persons Are Creative

Fortunately, some of these questions can be eliminated upon the evidence. All persons do create; all persons will create whether or not those who control the culture accept it. Thus the attitude of the educators should be:

1. To recognize that all persons create at all times whether they be teachers or pupils, educators or laymen.

2. To furnish the classroom climate in which such creativeness can be re-

leased, accepted, respected, and guided.

3. To help each person, child or adult, understand his own creative process and accept the results of his behavior upon himself and others.

These three aspects of the education problem will now be considered.

1. Why are all persons creative at all times?

Most dictionaries define the word *create* as "to bring into being." If this be true, every baby at birth has created himself for he has brought himself into being from the fertilized egg. He has accomplished this in interaction with a sympathetic external environment which has released, accepted, and respected his ability to do so. He has guided his growth by the internal interaction of his genes to fulfill the promise of his conception. At birth he knows, on the autonomic or visceral level, the process of his own growth. The energy or life is in him. It is outgoing, intaking, converting, accepting, and eliminating. It is a mutual cooperative relationship

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between him and his external world. His great purpose after birth is so to live in his new world as to raise his process to the level of conceptual action, since this is necessary for his highest self maturity. And every baby at birth apparently wishes to achieve this for it is his life-fulfillment. He struggles continuously against oppressing external conditions to realize it.

Some authorities state that to create means to evolve new thoughts or meanings or values from one's own experience thus remaking it into a more functional or useful organization. No person ever sums his experiences. Rather, he develops among them personal relationships called meanings or value judgments around which he unites what he accepts to meet his needs while he rejects what he believes to be of little present or future use. These personal meanings and values constitute who he is to himself and are his selectors of his external behavior toward others. As he remakes his experiences through these evolving meanings he transcends his old or existing self to higher behavior levels. To do this he must find in the existing external culture the same cooperative support for his creative process as he received in his intra-uterine life. This support is difficult for him to find. The adults who control the culture allow him "to bring himself into being" and to continue after birth to evolve his own physical structure by his normal process. But they try to deny him his birthright to create himself through his own evolving meanings within his own experiences. They want him to accept their controls, their patterns of experience, their directions of behavior. They believe that he is born with two

processes of growth—one for his physical development, and another called "learning" through which to acquire those aspects of his existing external environment that they select for him. Such a dualism denies him the integrative unity which he must preserve. While adults cannot prevent him from using his normal biological process in homes and schools, they set an environment lacking the sympathy, encouragement, and leadership which he must have to conceptualize his process on the higher levels of meaning necessary for his maturity. Thus he creates himself out of vague, unclarified meanings and values with unsatisfactory results to himself and others. He never really understands who he is or why others treat him as they do. Thus he is forced by an unsympathetic environment to arrest his development at some appropriate level of self-preservation.

2. *How can a classroom environment help the child create himself?*

There are many necessary things which constitute a classroom environment. Some are visible, such as physical equipment, books and supplies, children and teacher. Many are invisible. They are inside each person and are not open to inspection or public examination. Yet these internal responses to the external world are the stuff out of which the self is made. Most classrooms are organized on the dual or traditional theory of learning, which blocks or suppresses these internal meanings. The outside pressure is for the child to take in and pass back in form acceptable to the teacher the materials she has taught. His internal responses to these demands are rarely known to him or to her. To help

the child create himself, the classroom has to be changed from an authoritarian to a cooperative field. The teacher and pupils must work together to set the psychological conditions within which each child will release his inner responses so that he may receive help in clarifying them.

Building A Creative Climate

Since a cooperative psychological field cannot be patterned, I will discuss it under building the atmosphere, the ways of working, the process, the results.

As to atmosphere:

Every classroom has a feeling tone which each person receives by direct empathy. If he is to release his inner meanings he must emotionally believe that he is wanted as a member, that he has qualities which the others recognize, believe in and accept, that he is and can be different from others yet work with them mutually and cooperatively, that he has a right to grow up as his unique self, that every person is helping him develop all of his emergent possibilities as he is helping all others do the same. This feeling tone has been described in such words as belongingness, wantedness, security, status. These qualities are difficult to define verbally but they are as present as the people, they are as active as the life of the group, they are as certain to affect members as the air they breathe, they are a minimum essential for any normal self-development, they are the basis for the relaxed control of the internal environment, so necessary for each person to create intelligently the new meanings by which he transcends his existing self. At the outset and

in process this atmosphere is affected more by the teacher than by the children since she knows how to develop it while they have to learn. She never knowingly injects conditions that destroy it, she helps children verify their contributions to it. She accepts, respects, and helps them clarify their feelings as the internal motivation of their external behavior.

As to ways of working:

Such a feeling tone is rarely present in classrooms in schools and colleges. To create it the group must evolve new rules of the game or what children call ways of working. These revolve around the kinds of activities in which they engage, the way they manage them, and the center of emphasis in the learning. Here there are certain basic conditions.

First, the teacher must help the group remove all fears, threats, external demands from authoritarian experiences which keep the emotional tension too high for mutual interactive responses. These fears are inside the teachers and children as value judgments from past experience and are tendencies to action in present situations. They must be brought out in the open and reinterpreted on a more thoughtful basis. Once understood the tensions which surround them can be relieved while internal strength is being developed.

Second, the group must locate *new areas of need* or interest on which they can work together to reduce the hurts from old activities and to develop the new rules of the game in the more human atmosphere. Since all behavior is an attempt to satisfy need, improvement in behavior comes through select-

ing and clarifying *in process* the need which lies back of the action. Children must study their own needs in their own groups by their own creative process, better to understand themselves and thereby to improve their behavior. They improve very slightly when trying to work on adult needs which they cannot feel and study as belonging to them.

Third, each child must be free to create the new meanings necessary to release and emerge himself. In the new atmosphere and with his energy released to study his need his whole experience undergoes a reorganization. The center shifts openly from some outside adult to him. For the first time he feels what it means to face himself in his own life situations realistically. His whole field is more fluid, or less regimented. He perceives differently the released past experiences and evolves new arrangements in present situations. These original insights or meanings bring new needs and give new purpose to his behavior, so that he selects and creatively assimilates an increasing quantity and variety of the surrounding culture. And the teacher helps everyone promote a group quality which respects his normal right to create these new meanings which become his better self.

Fourth, the group members must understand through use or through personal empirical examination the process of their own creativeness which is their own life fulfillment. Since all children are born with this process and have it in common with all others, they are quick to feel its positive value. But this feeling of well being is not high enough for growth throughout life.

They must know the process conceptually so that they can recognize how it works in them, can describe it to others, and can lead groups in releasing and developing it. Such a level of meaning is reached over a period of years. It can be learned by any person with normal ability. It should be accomplished by all high school graduates. And it must be achieved by parents and teachers who have major responsibility for helping children become mature adults.

As to result:

There is always a feeling tone in every classroom. Within it each child locates and works on his needs and creates his meanings or value judgments which become himself. Within it he tries creatively to assimilate his environment so as to become a mature person. But the whole experience is difficult for him to manage *alone*, for others are less interested in helping him understand himself in his world than they are in imposing their world on him. Thus neither he nor they understand the process of their own growth.

The educational problem is whether to continue such traditional classroom conditions or whether to reorganize them around the modern evidence on growth, learning and self development. Since the child will create himself in whatever environment he may be located, it seems reasonable that classrooms should furnish the emotional tone, the basic experiences, and the emergent intelligence through which each person, including the teacher, can continue his development. With his higher level of maturity he will have greater willingness and ability to create with others a better life for all.

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