

Creativity and Its Psychological Implications

"While the child is practicing exercises, he cannot grow into a problem solver. While he is slavishly driven by the purposes of others, he cannot grow into a free man."

AUNT Eliza made pincushions for old and young in the village where I grew up. She begged for broken lamp chimneys which were plentiful in that day. She broke away the pearled tops to use for the base and bound small cushions on the jagged edges. When every man, woman and child in the village had at least two, it occurred to someone to ask her: "Aunt Eliza, why do you keep on making cushions when we all have so many?" After a thoughtful pause, she answered: "Just for a bein' a doin', I guess." She was probably right. It pleased her to be busy with the process. It did not much matter to her that she cared as little for the product as did the recipients.

Then there was old Professor Marlowe, long retired and much beloved. His fertile old brain kept right on wrestling with current problems. Reading, analyzing, formulating his opinions, there resulted a sort of Sociological Bulletin much sought after by his former students and highly valued by them.

Doubtless he, too, enjoyed the doing, yet it was clear that it was the bulletin, the end product, which was his primary concern. The enthusiasm of his

former students also added its piquancy. Whatever the varied satisfactions which triggered his doing, his major objective was the thing created, and the process by which it was created was of secondary importance.

Such examples are to be found in most fields of creativity. Some creators are unconcerned with the product, once created. Others who create in the same areas tolerate the process, even practice long hours on skills they dislike for the sake of the product. The psychological implications are bound to be different ones for these two situations.

For the purposes of this brief discussion, we shall define the product aspect of creativity as any form which results from the individual's energies that are expended over patterns which are new to him. Neither process nor product need be new in the world. It is his creation if it is new to him.

This breadth of concept will contain Aunt Eliza's pincushions and Dr. Marlowe's bulletins, and a myriad other formulations in between. Cakes and pies, pictures and poems, blueprints for architecture, social or material, all these are products of the creator's process. As "The Monk in

the Kitchen" says of the orderly state he has created there: "Lo, what was not, is."

By the process aspect of creativity, we shall mean the outflow of energy of individual or group through which a product is structured. As matter is defined as outflow of energy slowed down to materiality, so the creative process slows down to product. It is a total process, but a complex one. Its oneness is structured of part-processes one of which triggers another. As the process proceeds the playbacks report the degree of achievement. The sight or thought of food triggers salivation. This process triggers the next as the food progresses with the rhythmic movements of throat and gullet. The sight or thought of a gaunt black tree against a setting sun may trigger the artist to his paints, the musician to his score, the poet to his words, and a mother to the creation of a hearty warm soup against the autumn chill.

Now the successive processes become more apparent. That which was so lately a perception or idea, existing only in that nebulous area begins to take on thingness. It becomes real. Its reality consists in the form which is emerging from formlessness. It is a recipe, a tentative sequence of sounds, words or melodies. It is a basic sketch laid in on canvas. But the flow continues. It is no longer plan or vision. Its reality begins to be acted upon. It has become actual. There is now soup to eat, a symphony to hear. There are poems or pictures to stir the heart.

But the creator has made an earlier creation. His perception of his externality is his creation too. And it is uniquely his. His perception of the

item is peculiarly his own, an emergent out of the experiencing of his yesterdays, compounded upon those of his species, since time began. He sees and hears and feels, literally and figuratively. He produces fresh patterning whether in clay or color or sound. He accomplishes actuality as he pronounces his own creative word upon his substance. It is this word which establishes an order upon those items which were otherwise unrelated and chaotic.

When the kitchen is the studio, eggs, sugar and flour march at the command of the creative fiat, "let there be cake." And there is cake! Some artists use less concrete materials than eggs and sugar. Musician and poet may create from within, soundlessly with pencil on paper, hearing their creations only on their own resounding ears. Yet these, too, must have spoken their own type of "Let there be."

Sometime the creator must pass judgment on his work. As he works in quiet confidence or frenzied haste, the continuing playback will satisfy or frighten him. He may be easily pleased and far less than perfect creations result. It looked promising. It fell short. Sometimes his judgment may err in the opposite direction. He breaks his vase. He destroys his script. Rarely, it appears, is the creator able to look upon his creation and say: "It is good."

Ever Widening Areas of Experience

As we observe these moving processes we cannot but note that they parallel or perhaps are identical with those of growth of tissue which results in physical structure in the human in-

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dividual and also those of learning which result in understanding. At one time we might have objected: "This may be true when new knowings are being created, but what of those processes in which a young organism is learning what those before him have created or reiterated?" But this position is no longer tenable.

It now appears that whatever each of us learns, he must first create by his selection of items out of the whole, and by the own interpretation he puts upon or into his perceiving. What he sees comes from him. What his creative perception makes of what he sees makes of an experience whatever it is for him. He and his creating are always in process, for as Ames has pointed out, perception is never more than prognosis for action. It is the acting which makes the actuality. Whatever that action establishes, is for him "something new under the sun."

To whatever extent this point of view proves valid, to that extent all men are their own creators. Their primary creation is the self each is. This creation does not get finished and done with once for all. It is a never-ending process. With each new-made self, the created becomes creator upon the stuff of his externality. He establishes continually new relatednesses between himself and the whole and the parts of his externality.

Since the human specimen is what he is, the process of creating is inevitable. What the process yields is not. That will depend to some extent upon

the building blocks selected, and those available for selection in his externality, as well as upon the uniquenesses which are his. Carbohydrates do not build what proteins build. Science fiction will not build the same purposes or convictions as Romantic fiction. With whatever stuff he creates, the creation will be the objectification of the correspondences set up between the creator and that which he chooses from his externality upon which to feed.

It is the recognition of these facts, however vaguely conceived, which lies behind so-called modern education. In order to know, the learner must do. As a doer, he is a creator. As a creator he becomes a knower. Such practices and concepts as are useful stem from these principles. Such as are less than useful come either from inadequate or misdirected creation on the one hand, or on the other from a misconception of the significance of the principles.

In "premodern days" education was also concerned with doing. But the conception was somewhat different. The learner "did" his examples in arithmetic. He "did" his assignments. By these repetitive doings, it was thought that he increased his skills and broadened his knowledge. When he was a free creator fulfilling his own drives and purposes, he learned and learned richly. When he was motivated only by the purposes of others for him, many of which he could not espouse, he learned slavish compliance or slavish rebellion. In arithmetic he "did" so many examples and had so little experience in problem solving, that he most often became a chronic collector of right answers, and seldom

a problem solver or a mathematician. While he is practicing exercises, he cannot grow into a problem solver. While he is slavishly driven by the purposes of others, he cannot grow into a free man.

The modern teacher, in the elementary grades at least, has caught this vision. She takes her pupils out of the school building, into the flux of living. They visit adult activities. They go to dairies and firehalls and into stores and courts. The teachers take their children out, not alone to give them some freedom from the unnatural confinement of the schoolrooms, worthy as that objective might be. They go into the rich streams of living action, to experience it first hand, and to put into head and hands the stuff of learning. They return with a commonality of experience to share and to understand.

Those who will recall the film of *Skippy and the Three R's*, will remember how Miss Temple drew from the children's own fresh experiencing the words they learned to spell and read. She merely wrote upon the board the signs and symbols for their knowings. It was created by all and read by all. Presently they will also learn to do their own writing, too, although they will likely in all their adult life speak a thousand and read a hundred for the one word they write.

Experience tends to waken interest and provoke wishes and desires. Wishes and desires drive to purposes. Purposes demand fulfillment. Purposes carried out become experience. Experiences prompt further action, and fresh energy is released for further learning.

No detailing is necessary of the materials and practices by which children create their knowing. Paint and clay, words and stories, excursions, real and play occupations are his "chaos." The creator does and knows. He becomes and comes to be.

More Than A Kitten

In a recent experience in India, part of our class of Head Masters of High Schools had gone on a trip. Those who could not afford the trip were making teaching aids of one kind and another. There were contour maps, bulletin boards, dramas, three-dimensional pictures of high moments in Indian History and Literature. It was planned that when the travelers returned we would have an exchange session. The travelers would describe their experiences and explain how they intended to use what they had learned on the trip when they returned to their schools. Those who had remained would reciprocate by showing what they had made, demonstrate how it was done, and show how they intended to use it on their return.

Each participant chose his own project. Those who had caught the concept of togetherness joined forces with others and shared the task. Some few could not yet bring themselves to this and chose things that they could do by themselves. As they rummaged through the materials they unearthed some patterns for stuffed toys, which had gotten in with our materials somehow. These patterns seemed poorly suited to high school boys and girls.

What was my surprise as I moved about among the sixty-five to find Mohan sewing together the pieces of

what would be a stuffed toy kitten. I was not surprised that he worked alone. I had not thought that he would want to work with anyone. He had been our despair the first two weeks. He was a little man, and his dignity had not been quite tailored to his size. It sat a little large on his narrow shoulders. He kept stuffing his stuffed shirt attitude to hold it together. He used complaints about food and service, the songs we sang and the things we did and didn't do. Yet here he sat, with the most beatific look on his face and had sewed the two pieces of white cotton all around leaving no opening to turn and stuff it. How was I to show him what needed doing without spoiling his state of bliss? I paused by his chair, and with one of his most infrequent smiles, he said: "I make a kit-ton because I can sew." He pronounced it sue. "My mother died when I was young. I can sew and also cook." If his kitten had come alive it could not have purred more complacently. How was one to correct without wrecking the joy? The stitches were a bit longer on the tiny ear, and I seized on that. "I'd hate to try to turn that from that tiny ear. I'd expect it would ravel out." And I passed on quickly.

As I glanced back, I saw that he had discovered his error, and sat there glaring at his kitten. He who was so skilled in finding other people's errors, had no technique for handling his own. Whether he glared it open or ripped it, I do not know. When I came back again it was turned and he was pushing cotton wool into it with the butt of his pen.

"Quite a kitten," I commented. "When I make them I always have

trouble with the neck. I don't get enough stuffing in, and the head tips over."

"I shall stuff it well, and I shall do it a beard," he answered. Then it was time for the reports. What would Mohan have to say about the uses of a stuffed kitten with secondary school pupils? When his turn came he strode to the center of the circle. In his hand he held his kitten. "Friends," he cried in a challenging tone. "You may think it strange that I make a stuffed kit-ton toy to use with high school boys. I will explain you." There followed a meticulous description of cutting and sewing. He made no mention of his own error. He told the process down to the last stitch in putting in a paste-board base, "that the kit-ton may stand."

"And I shall use it," he continued. "as I have learned here to say pleasantly what might otherwise be unpleasant. When the boys have made their notebooks messy, or have grown too noisy, I shall take kit-ton from my pocket, and I shall say: 'Kit-ton, the boys are too noisy aren't they? And kit-ton will say yes,'" and he poked the kitten's head with his forefinger.

A titter went round the group. It was partly in recognition of the good performance, and partly surprise at his unwonted gentleness. For a second the old pattern flared. A frown more appropriate to a Grecian Jove sat on his bantam brow. "It is my kit-ton. I have made it. Let no one say that it is his." There was a round of laughter and the cloud lifted.

"I wish to say more," he continued. "I wish to say that this is more than a kit-ton and a way to say things. It is

also a miracle. At first I have thought this all quite silly," he waved an all-inclusive arm . . . "singing songs, dancing, and called work, when it is not even study. Then I began to see a little. I saw how we laughed when we sang of her who comes round the mountain with her six white horses. We even laughed when we sang of Clementine just while we sang that we were awfully sorry. I saw and I also laughed. Then I began to see how the laughing stucked us together. Then the reports we made together, the manuals we wrote. The excursions—they all stucked us closer together about more important things.

"Behold me. I am not a young man. I am lecturer in a teacher training college. Yet I, even I have made such a kit-ton from khadi cloth. I sewed it well, and I am proud, and I shall use it to teach my young teachers how to say unpleasant things pleasantly. But as this cotton became kit-ton in my hands, something happened to me. I became my own creation, something other than I was. I cannot name it, so I shall call it the miracle of the kit-ton, and I shall not again be the same man."

As he took his seat an almost holy hush preceded the burst of applause. What does all this mean? The creator creates and is himself created. One would have to be a chronic Pollyanna to believe that the making of a toy could be counted on to make a sour grumpy man into an understanding teacher, yet the creating process may. The teacher, as she assumes the creator role ceases to be the imparter of knowledge, if indeed she ever succeeded in doing it.

The function becomes rather that of a stage manager and scene shifter. She moves up circumstances a little nearer or lights some obscure corner. She does not try to put knowledge into him. She tries to lead him into areas which are rich and experience-laden. She trusts him to create his own knowing. She is not so much concerned with his habit, as with his habitat, "that state of nature in which a species is at home." She does not attempt to feed him. She undertakes to make reasonably safe and highly inviting the ever widening areas of his awarenesses so that he can "go in and out, and find pasture."

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