

Creative Teaching for Creative Thinking and Living

We must discover "some of the ways in which we, as persons, can find the creative approach to our task, can remake what we do, can proceed to get intrinsic satisfactions out of the release of human potential."

IT is highly significant to note the growing concern in America for creativity in other fields—not only in education—everywhere. Perhaps it was because I was to speak on the subject, I found reference to creativity in *Fortune*, in the *Scientific American*, in the ads of the *New York Times*; wherever I looked I seemed to run into something about creativity. Very often, "Wanted, creative engineers"; "creative scientists"; "creative managers"; there is evidently a dearth of the kind of people that our age takes. It takes creative, formative, responsible, forward-thinking people—not people going around in circles on the same spot. It takes creative planning to live today. It takes creative adjustment to the unprecedented rate of change and to the expansion of knowledge. All these are essential. But they are not only essential to these various fields; they are more essential in that field which is socially designated as the one to develop creative potentiality in the common man's children.

We need creativity for survival; we need creativity for human advance. The common man needs to learn to think and live more creatively to meet the

emergent demands and challenges of modern life; to take advantage of the opportunities that are opening as the common man comes into his age. There is, then, greater demand not only for creativity in education, but still greater need for raising our sights for creative leadership in education. There is wide interest in creative development, in creative uses of leisure, for release and recreation, as well as in all fields of work and scientific inquiry, and in esthetics.

This creative quality seems to be so pervasively essential, that it has a right to make demands on public education and to put a premium on creative teaching. Whoever you are, wherever you live and work, whatever your role, you have a challenge to carry the concern for creative teaching into constructive action in the field. Let us assume that you recognize this challenge as a responsibility. Let us proceed on the further assumption that you expect to do something about this challenge.

How shall we begin? The creative person begins by re-examining his assumptions. We can assume that:

1. Creativity is a widely distributed, general, but uniquely human potentiality.

2. Creative potential can be fostered and developed in young children, in youth, and in adults.

3. Creativity manifests itself very broadly in many diverse fields of human endeavor and in diverse ways and forms; it is not limited to the arts or to the gifted, nor is it separate. It is in human life, in things wherever they are. If it is not manifest, it is potential.

4. Creativity can be assumed to have vital significance, even more than usual, in a time like ours, because of man's need for new answers; for an adaptive integrated outlook in facing the unforeseeable, in facing problems about which he has no insight and no preparatory training or skill, and in facing conditions for which there are no patterns or precedents in human experience.

5. We can assume that there are conditions that favor the development and fulfillment of creative potential; but if we can do that, we must also assume the converse—that there are conditions and circumstances that obstruct or deny creativity. It is relative to what you do about it.

6. We can assume that the conditions which influence creative potential in either positive or negative ways are urgent matters for human concern—especially if we are in education.

7. We may assume that creative teaching increases the likelihood of creative learning, of creative development and fulfillment, that it augments the conditions that are favorable to the emergence of creative potential. Conversely, we may say that it hinders the influence of the obstructive forces.

8. We can assume that increasing insights into creativity are bound to have greater bearing on educational advance than they have today. They may even

lead us to reconstruction of a basic sort. Perhaps all we have done to base education on skill is very one-sided. Perhaps the skills that are oriented to creative use need to be developed in an entirely different way than the skills that are just perpetuated as habits.

Creative teaching, then, might be construed as the sensitive, insightful developmental guidance which makes school experiences optimally educative and conducive to the development and fulfillment of creative potential in individuals and groups. You become creative by experiences in which you try to act creatively; and cumulatively, those experiences change your faith in creativity and your ability to do things for which you do not have habits and skills. We, as leaders in education, must learn first of all to discriminate between what is creative and what isn't. So many of us are not clear on that score yet. We cannot help other people to be creative if we don't understand the difference ourselves. We must learn first to value degrees of creativity. The person who makes a first attempt is bound to make a dinky little attempt or one that's too big for him to handle. You're going to have to be patient with both of those. With the smallness of the attempt, with the person who hasn't much courage, and with the courage of the attempt for the person who hasn't much success. There is a tolerance in creative leadership which knows what to do in each case; in the one, to make the problems more significant, and in the other, to help people get set to be more

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successful in their bold efforts. We need to learn to value creative approaches if we are to engage in creative leadership and encourage creative teaching.

We can learn much from creative teachers. Let us introduce some of their contributions. We hear from a creative teacher in central New York that a cold, impersonal human environment certainly blocks creativity. Do you know what a cold, impersonal human environment is? I heard of one. The child brought a note that had to do with President Eisenhower's illness and Mamie's answer to a little courtesy that was extended. The child wanted to share the note, and the teacher said, "Lay it on the desk and be sure you take it when you go home." I know that was a cold person. Saying to a child, "What are you doing? I didn't tell you to write that," is cold and inhuman because that child was going to write about something he cared about and not what he was told to write about.

In Georgia I saw the loveliest thing. I visited a classroom at 11:29—a kindergarten that dismissed at 11:30. That's a wrong time to visit but I knew if I didn't go, the teacher would think, "Why did she skip the kindergarten? So many people do." So I thought I would put my head in the door. The teacher said, "Oh, children, we have a visitor. Let's sit down. We've got our coats on but we can sing our daffodil song. You know, sometimes friends come and we have to change our plans. I'm glad you're big enough to change your plans." And they sang the daffodil song and then they went home. It wasn't music time. But it would seem that creativity needs to be cultivated in a warmly human environment in which regimented routines can sometimes be pushed over for human values without changing the basic

rhythm of regular living. I don't think those children were damaged.

A Missouri teacher describes the impact of stereotyped things by saying, "Rigid, fixed expectations, rigid personalities have a bad effect on creative personalities."

An Ohio teacher comments on the non-creative drives of teachers who stifle creativity. People who do that may actually put conformity above creative variability which Dewey tells us is one of our most precious human resources—the variability out of which individuality and progress can be cultivated.

Some teachers only like cosmos paintings that are all alike; I painted one once that looked wilted. I was only a child but I'll never forget that mine went into the waste basket because the flowers all had to be alike to make a good border design along the top of the board. Are we making border designs or are we releasing creative potential in children?

A teacher in Hawaii says that creativity in teaching hinges on freedom to explore and experiment supported by an open-minded, active curiosity, by insight into human development and faith in oneself, faith in others, sensitivity to beginning efforts and their potentialities for growth.

A western Washington teacher adds emphasis to the exploratory nature of creative teaching and learning. She says, "Creativity lifts the monotony of the classroom into the exhilarating atmosphere of discovery and search."

A Florida teacher writes of the need for a chance to think and contemplate and not just jump from one direction to another.

Another teacher from Florida refers to the way in which creative teaching develops and fosters choices, a capacity to make and follow value judgments.

to test them in action and become increasingly self-directed.

One from North Carolina stresses the need of challenging learners to try out their own ideas instead of accepting those of other people, and says that they need to learn to value their ideas and to be valued as persons if they're to become creative.

We can also learn, not just from these teachers, but from a direct study of creative teaching in process, by watching some creative teachers and analyzing what they do; see what it is that makes the difference in their human relations, in the effect of what they say, in what they provide and how they plan; search for the component conditions that constitute the flow of creative living, that involve children in creative participation with others, that infect those who are less creative with aspirations to be more creative. A group of faculty members at Ohio State University is doing research observing creative students, creative teachers, studying and analyzing creative performance, projecting research to see what it is, how it works, how we can find out more about it. It will be at least another five years until we know some of the things we now know enough to ask about. But we have to start to find out.

Others are finding the same thing exceedingly challenging. Now some, unfortunately, are assuming that all the techniques of quantitative research and mechanical learning have to be nailed down on creative research. No, there are some types of creative procedures for which we must invent new types of creative evaluation in order to keep them viable and not to squelch creativity by imposing mechanical requirements. But I do not think that this means there is no rigor in the research. It's just a creative rigor—a different kind.

From such studies, it can be concluded that openness to possibilities and ideas enables the individual to consider alternatives: to move freely instead of being habit bound; to engage in exploratory, tentative action, informative action; to order his own attempts; to select those which please him most as a creative person; to project the ideas; to integrate his ideas into a composite or into an expression in some fit medium or into communication or into both. It is also possible to note degrees of personal involvement, self-directive commitment. Do you have to give extra awards to the person or does that person hold himself to his task? You can get an answer through research. Is he involved or is he, easily distracted? Does he stop at the first chance he gets or does he look for ways to go on with what he is doing? Does he come back to more of the same or do you have to push him and prod him and force him? When we need extra motives and formal discipline to just keep people sitting in their seats, there isn't much creativity holding them to any involvement or commitment or any intrinsic satisfaction which will go on when the pressure is turned off.

Another place we can look, not only at the creative act itself in process—not just the product—is to the literature in which we find out how creativity is valued or how it is understood by persons in various disciplines. I want to cite first Ralph N. Turner, a great historian. He is currently engaged in a long-term study of the achievement of man and he says that the capacity of creativeness is the central theme of history. Man, with a capacity of creativeness can transform material factors and reshape goals, bring visions to reality—only man. And the history of man's achieving these things is the romance of

human history. Man's creativeness, according to Turner, projects lines of human advance which history then records. Man's creative propensities account for the transformation of conditions of living material factors, for the reshaping of goals and human aspirations, for the visions which are brought to reality. Surely these propensities are something which shape personality, which education should not neglect. The capacities to do these things can be valued, can be projected, can be developed in school. Their history can be noted.

I want to take another person, this time an artist, speaking as an artist concerned with educational implications of creativity. Barkan says, "The child's capacity to create new and challenging problems for himself is his most potent source of continuous growth and development." Notice he says, "creating problems." Some people run away from them. Let's admit the fact that when man faces his problems, he grows. When man creates a problem at the end of the road when he doesn't know where to go, he finds a most potent source for his own continuing development. This imbues a child with a zest for living—an eagerness to meet experience as it unfolds. Again Barkan says, "It is the surest route to mature living."

Speaking as an anthropologist, Margaret Mead calls attention to the need for cultivating creative adaptivity and forward adjustment in the light of cultural changes and challenges that are unprecedented. Another anthropologist, Montagu, says this, "The school is not a place where twigs are bent or minds are molded, but where growing human beings are afforded the opportunities of their birthright, the supports, the stimulations, the encouragement for the opti-

mal development of their potentialities for being the kind of human beings who confer survival benefits to the creative development of their fellow men."

Writing as a psychologist, Gordon Allport views personality itself as a creative process of becoming in which the appropriate, the striving or aspiring self, projects that which it values and extends itself to realize what it projects. Creative learning is a pushing out toward what you value to become. He deplores the view of growth as a reaction to past and present stimuli and the neglect of the dynamics of futurity of orientation, of intention and valuation as these contribute to becoming. Maslow calls attention to human needs necessary for well-being and for the maintenance of homeostasis or organic equilibrium. That's what need tensions are, and they need to be released and balanced. But creative aspiration tensions need to be projected and held, and they lead to human advance. It is another order of development, the development of the future through the encouragement of creative aspiration and projection. He calls the one "deficit motives," and the other, "growth motives."

Further study would seem to warrant the inference that more and more is coming out that gives us greater faith in our creative approaches to teaching, but we need to go on with research as well as with experiment to try out what we already know. Gesell says that if we could work creatively, we would have less fatigue, less strain, more integration, more wholeness, more satisfaction. Perhaps you're happy enough, perhaps you're never tired, but I think most teachers need something that keeps them whole, that makes them less tired, and that keeps them integrated. Creative teaching has something in common with other creative endeavors in that it keeps

us aspiring, growing, and striving forward in spite of strain, and reduces tension of the one kind as we project the other.

If we take these and other things together, we must grant that our pre-service training did not give us this kind of help—mine didn't. But it is not too late. We can take forward steps. We can't go as far as we would like with steady assurance that somebody knows where it all leads. But we can't wait indefinitely. Education has to do with lives that are in the growing. We can't let another generation come out without some benefit of what we know. There's already a lag. We must begin because our own reorientation takes time and the need is so urgent. Now, how shall we begin? Well, perhaps by asking ourselves, "What does a mature person do that creative teaching could help more people learn to do?"

1. He uses his problems as challenges instead of stumbling blocks. He goes on from where his habits leave off to explore, to pioneer, to find what he doesn't know instead of depending on his techniques and skills and habits and past knowledge; he is not habit bound.

2. He turns resources, even odd ones, to account in new ways. The creative person is open to new ideas.

3. The creative person looks and thinks and feels and forms before he jumps. He considers his own situational conditions. Situationally, things have to be adjusted to where you are, and according to who is there. In due time, the creative person aspires to do something he never did before—to take a step of action in which he is just a little bit shaky and uncertain but he knows that he has to take that step. The first time is a shaky process but you have to do it to

get over it. The creative person knows that and so he moves on.

4. He evaluates and judges what he does and is waiting for a chance to try it again.

5. He doesn't ask someone to give him a pattern.

6. He wants to see the field in which his action is taking form.

7. He is responsible and responsive about value combinations and conflicts. If one thing makes another impossible, the relative values are considered. If two things can be gained in one step, the creative solution is to take the step that makes two values reinforce each other—sometimes more than two.

8. He does something with his ideas. He does something with his hunches but he is not over-confident about them, nor smug because they are his. Something satisfying in this process keeps him moving forward. He is wholehearted in that movement. He does what he does for its worthwhileness.

9. He looks ahead, undertakes steps with a sense of direction; but he also responds negatively to coercive measures. He withdraws or finds channels that are open or makes a protest when creativity is blocked. He is open to cooperative planning but he does not simply become a rubber stamp in a group. His ideas contribute.

Well do I remember, as a teacher, being told once, when I reported what I had done to help slow learners in arithmetic, that I didn't make "a good cog." My supervisor smiled when she said that. I really added insult to injury in my reply to her. I said, "I don't think the Lord intended me for a good cog." I don't think I ever spoke more truly of myself. I was young enough to be so shocked that I trotted right down to

the assistant superintendent and asked to be shifted to another job where I would have a different supervisor, and fortunately, was given a chance to tell why I wanted to move. I was given the chance to move and my creative development started as soon as I stopped trying to be a good cog. Some of us are altogether too diligent in trying to be cogs. Teachers need to sense and value their own potential creativity as much as supervisors need to value it. Now if teachers gain insight into this, they need encouragement. They need a chance to develop a vision of themselves and a self-image of themselves doing things they have never done before.

I suggest creative role playing in groups as a way to dramatize both the creative and the uncreative teacher—to make people feel at home in understanding the difference, and at ease in expecting themselves to start a few creative ways of doing, or to use more creative ways if they are already well started. One of the hardest things for a person who has been relatively uncreative to do is that business of shifting to a new way of responding to experience. That takes courage. But a lot of things that you *play* at become easier to *work* at, and role playing in a group in which you *pretend* you are a creative teacher may give you the courage to try to *be* one when the children are there. There are other ways, but I certainly think we need to try some of the ways in which we, as persons, can find the creative approach to our task, can remake what we do, can

proceed to get the intrinsic satisfactions out of the release of human potential. Those are the satisfactions supreme in the role of the teacher.

Now may I ask, "How are you going to start?" Perhaps you have to find one thing in this article that hits home. Perhaps you have some fixed ideas for which you argue. Perhaps you have some stereotypes or patterns that you take out every October—or Christmas—and use again. Perhaps they are just ideas that were once fresh and that are now stale and dead. Give yourself the joy of new ideas—new attempts. Perhaps what you need to do is to select some new aspirations, to do some studying past the line of credits and degrees. Run a creative experiment and find out for yourself that if you really want to learn, any adjustment you really want to make, if you go at it creatively, will have some measure of success—and is worth trying.

If there is a shortage of creative engineers, if there is a shortage of creative designers, if there is a shortage of creative leaders, perhaps there are children in our schools who need to be headed toward creativity to reduce that shortage, and perhaps there is not only a shortage of teachers but a shortage of creativity in courage to step out, to redefine the educational task—the curriculum task—the research task, as one of implementing creativity in our teaching—in children's learning—in their thinking—in our living—in our world—in our difficult world today.

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