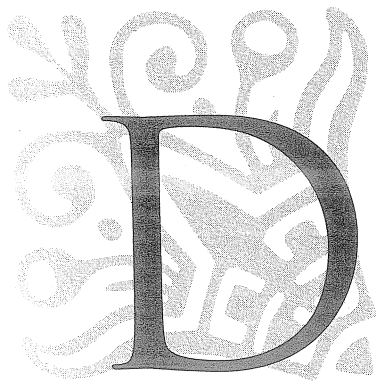


## CHAPTER 9

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# ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY



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espite the fact that creativity is difficult to define, identify, and evaluate, we must not ignore this trait in talented children. The world depends on creative people for contributions in all areas of life, from technology, travel, and medicine, to movies, music, and literature. If that were not reason enough, the most compelling motive for our attention is that we are committed to enabling individuals to live fulfilled lives. Parents and teachers need to know that they have a powerful influence on the development of creativity.

## WHAT WE KNOW

Although much of the recent research concerning creativity has not been centered in the field of gifted education, numerous studies have important things to say about the development of creative talent in children. Feldman and Benjamin (1998) gave examples of some of the newest areas

of investigative research, which include artificial intelligence (creative process in computers), historiometry (i.e., why clusters of creative genius occur at the same time), developmental psychology (searching the lives of extreme achievers for characteristics), and inventive and innovative thinking (pp. 83–84). This broadening of the concept of creativity opens possibilities for students to be recognized in many fields other than art, drama, or music. The new developments also legitimize the creative process as necessary for success in industry, academia, and other careers.

It is revealing that each study, article, chapter, and book about creativity begins with a detailed description of the way the author views the construct. At first, creativity was considered to be the study of genius, then the study of imagination (Rugg, 1963). Finally, the word *creativity* appeared in the dictionary, and it was defined as the ability to make something new (Piiro, 1992). Definitions today range from Winner and Martino's (1993) "... inventiveness within a domain. A creative individual revolutionizes a domain of knowledge" (p. 253), to Treffinger, Sartore, and Cross's (1993) "Creativity is one among a number of important skills people use to reason, solve problems, make decisions, and add meaning and value to life" (p. 557), to Piiro's (1992) "Creativity is a swampy concept" (p. ii). There are areas of general agreement: Creativity is complex; it can be nurtured or lost; parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors have tremendous power to influence and shape its development; there are stages in its development; it is visible in its production; and creative people exhibit characteristics that must be understood by those who desire to enable its fulfillment.

Creativity derives its complexity from individual differences in personality, knowledge, environment, motivation, and receptivity, as well as creative abilities (Davis, 1997). All of these components are shaped by societal values at large (Shore, Cornell, Robinson, & Ward, 1991; Tannenbaum, 1983), and family and school values locally. Isaksen (1987) states that there is not one definition, because creativity appears differently, in differing degrees, and with different kinds of productivity in individuals. Perhaps the most noticeable differences are seen in the emerging creativity or "germinal creativity" of a child who is not yet skilled (Fishkin, 1988), as compared to the mature productivity of an adult (Fishkin & Johnson, 1998).

Murdock and Puccio (1993) believe that the meaning of creativity can best be captured by studying the interactions among MacKinnon's (1961) four perspectives of personality, process, press (environment), and product. Yet, Sawyer (1992) and Martindale (1990) found that a significant portion of creative processing happens on an unconscious level. Each person brings to the process his or her own history and experiences that impact creative thought even at this unconscious level.

Csikszentmihalyi (1998) raises the discussion about personal creativity—small "c"—and cultural creativity—big "C." Many who have characteristics that should lead them to creative pursuits do not become successful. He believes creativity to be a multidimensional interaction amid the person, the

social system, and the cultural system, with all three synchronized for "C" to occur.

There has long been debate about defining creativity by a connection to intelligence. Wallach (1985) reported numerous studies in the arts, sciences, architecture, mathematics, writing, and leadership that showed IQ scores to be poor predictors of creative accomplishment in any field. The one intellectual ability that appeared to operationalize divergent thinking was ideational fluency, which served as an index of creativity in many contexts in preschool to high school students. The attempt to separate intelligence and creativity may have originated with the 1972 Marland Report, which listed creativity as one type of giftedness rather than as a feature of all giftedness (Piirto, 1992). Guilford's (1970) Structure of the Intellect, Torrance's (1974) Tests of Creative Thinking, Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, and Renzulli's (1977) Enrichment Triad Model were among the theories offered to explain the relationship of IQ and creativity. Today, the "evolving idea is that creativity is necessary for giftedness, and not separate from it" (Piirto, 1992, p. 24).

Han and Marvin (2002) review the discussion of general creativity versus domain-specific creativity, and suggest from their study of second-grade students that creativity may be more domain-specific than thought. Their subjects exhibited an interesting range of creative abilities tied to certain domains rather than a pervasive, uniform ability that showed up in diverse domains.

Even as we admit that the complexity of creativity makes defining it difficult, there is agreement that creativity can be nurtured and developed in a person, or it can be repressed and even lost. For all children, creativity training and recognition of production is important; here, we look at the necessity of addressing the needs of gifted children by understanding their creative characteristics.

### *Characteristics of Creative Individuals*

Dabrowski's theory of emotional development suggests that creative, gifted individuals have high levels of emotional overexcitability, expanded awareness, and heightened responses, which result in above-average types and degree of expression (as discussed in O'Connor, 2002, and in Silverman, 1993). It may be these same intense emotions and sensitivities, coupled with introversion and the usual school-related rejections and boredom, that cause some students to be at risk for mental illness and suicide (Silverman). Jamison (1993) looked at the timing and depth of mood changes that appeared to open or inhibit creative thought. Nickerson (1999) spoke of the crippling fear some creative children suffer when faced with failure or ridicule. Gardner's (1993) in-depth, retrospective case studies of seven famous creative people such as Picasso, Einstein, and Gandhi showed more vulnerability and marginalization evident in them than in the general population. Other case studies of creative students, especially adolescents, show that because of these characteristics, there is a need

for counselors who are trained to work with gifted teens to facilitate the right educational plan at a critical time (Hébert, 1998; Renzulli, Reis, Hébert, & Diaz, 1995).

A list of specific traits of creative individuals was given by VanTassel-Baska (1998):

- independence in attitude and social behavior;
- dominance;
- introversion;
- tolerance for ambiguity;
- openness to stimuli, wide interests;
- self-acceptance;
- intuitiveness;
- flexibility;
- an asocial attitude, unconcern for social norms, risk-takers;
- social presence and poise;
- radicalism, rejection of external constraints;
- ability to fantasize and toy with ideas; and
- aesthetic and moral commitment to work (pp. 383–384).

To this list, Amabile (1989) added the following thinking styles that are typical of creative people:

- able to break out of patterns of thinking,
- understand complexity,
- suspend judgment while generating as many ideas as possible,
- see relationships between ideas,
- remember well and accurately,
- see things in ways others do not, and
- use tricks to prompt thinking (make the familiar strange and the strange familiar; pp. 48–49).

Neihart and Olenchak (2002) reiterated that creative people are:

- open to new ideas and experiences,
- persevering,
- nonconforming,
- intellectually and emotionally mature, and
- self-confident and aware of their abilities.

On the other hand, Davis (1997) reminded us that there are less-esteemed traits, as well. Creative people often challenge rules, and can be indifferent to formalities, careless, sloppy with details or unimportant matters, and intolerant or temperamental.

One area of consensus is the direct influence of parents, teachers, and mentors on the development of a child's creativity. Retrospective studies of highly creative people continually identified the critical importance, and in some cases, the life-saving effects of having at least one adult who saw beyond non-

conforming behavior and nurtured and championed the child's creative efforts (Kemple & Nissenberg, 2000; Piirto, 1992, 1998; Silverman, 1993; Treffinger et al., 1993; VanTassel-Baska, 1998). These adults were willing to devote time, resources, and leadership to the children's development. Field and laboratory studies (Amabile, 1989) netted the following ways in which parents, in particular, support their children's creative inclination:

- They are authoritative and give their children freedom without excessive worry about risks.
- They respect their children as individuals and as creative persons and see them as capable.
- They are moderately close as a family, not dependent, but accepted.
- They are not permissive, but share values instead of levying rules.
- They emphasize achievement over grades, and they appreciate and cultivate creativity.
- They observe the children to see where interests lie, and then capitalize on those.
- They are active and have many interests themselves.
- They exhibit humor and family fun.
- They provide and take part in experiences that are stimulating.
- They are often models of creative thinking and behavior (pp. 103-112).

Over the years, there has even been some suggestion that less positive family characteristics may encourage a rebellious attitude, leading to more independent, divergent thinking (i.e., Siegelman, 1973). However, most researchers see as desirable home and school environments that allow children time to explore and experiment and that are supportive and nurturing; environments that are characterized by pressure, control, and criticism are detrimental to creative development (Hirsh-Pasek, 1991).

In a related study concerning home support, Isenberg and Jalongo (2001) found that some parents are skeptical of play and creative expression, seeing them as frivolous and a waste of instructional time in school. Yet, Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer (1995) classified this as an incubation time of "idling and leisure" (p. 359), and said that an always-busy schedule does not permit the necessary opportunity for reflection and insight. Their case study subjects (who were adults) reported rich and creative insight occurring at those "frivolous" times throughout their lives.

In the same way that characteristics of academically talented children translate into academic needs, the characteristics of creatively gifted children indicate curricular needs. Researchers are in accord that creativity can be developed through attention to skills and to providing an environment of acceptance and encouragement. For many years, dissension was heard in whether to instruct students in creative thinking skills in a context, such as writing class or mathematics, or to give instruction of skills in isolation for concentrated effort on learning the properties of the skills. Wallach (1985) said that



"[c]reative work takes place in a context, and that context cannot be ignored" (p. 381). Davis (1997) disagreed and saw self-actualized creativity—the goal of a creative life—as content free and able to be enhanced by instruction in techniques and attitudes without tying it to content. As others lined up on both sides, it appears that a combination of drawing attention to the metacognitive aspects of creative thinking skills *and* linking them to specific domains results in the best transfer and integration of creative strategies (Feldhusen, 1993; VanTassel-Baska, 1996).

The school's responsibility to provide an environment where potential is realized means including a child's creative, as well as academic, potential. This is often at odds with today's tight classroom schedules and substantial curricular goals that must be met. In fact, Atkinson (2000) found in a "real-world" situation of technology design, teachers may structure learning experiences to reduce creativity because they do not value creative thinking and find it difficult and time consuming to evaluate. The feeling that creative thinking is not welcome is experienced by children in some classrooms where their creative ideas take discussions and projects off in new directions not anticipated and not appreciated by the teacher.

Nickerson (1999) gave recommendations for enhancing creativity, but cautioned that personality traits and environmental factors combine to produce or inhibit growth in creativity and creative endeavors. He listed the necessity of *purpose* first, and said it is "essential to creative expression—nobody carves a statue without intending to do so" (p. 408). He encouraged developing basic and domain-specific skills and knowledge, engaging in playfulness, the rewarding of exploration, and the building of motivation for hard work and positive beliefs about one's abilities. He also advocated the learning of self-management skills (especially helpful when the person gains notoriety) and strategies for productive thinking.

Several researchers have organized the creative process into stages to help understand the path of its development. Kirschenbaum's (1998) Creativity Classification System showed that novices, just learning and developing expertise, are in the first phase of Contact (approaching new situations with eagerness), Consciousness (maintaining a thoughtful, questioning attitude), Interest (working to meet own high standards), and Fantasy (using imagination). After a time of Incubation (remaining internally open) and Creative Contact (experiencing insight), those who are creatively more mature move into Inspiration (feeling empowered to work), Production (making the product), and Verification (evaluating the effectiveness of the creation). VanTassel-Baska (1996) offered four life stages in the developing of writing talent that may hold true for other creative growth: (a) born into a family that values the literary and intellectual life; (b) informal early development of the craft of writing; (c) active experimentation with various forms of writing; and (d) progressive development of mature form and idea in successive works.

## WHAT WE CAN DO

It is not that creative children are fragile, volatile people who require hot-house treatment. However, it is important to learn and care about children as individuals who deserve opportunities to develop their talents to the highest levels possible. Parents and teachers can provide many kinds of support to nurture children and creative talents alike.

### *At Home*

☛ Reach beyond the school for development of creative talent for those students who require more advanced instruction, mentoring, and challenges in their fields (Haroutounian, 1995). Look for summer programs and special public or private schools that offer arts or sciences or other areas of focus that more closely match the talents and needs of certain students.

☛ Allow a place at home and at school where some work can remain “in progress” for a time, focusing on the process of the task instead of finishing and the potential reward (i.e., grade, praise). Provide materials and free up time to use them. Display projects, writings, paintings—any fruit of creative labor.

☛ Provide lessons, instruments, guest authors, dancers, scientists, and other experts from a wide array of fields, as well as trips to concerts and lectures (and then to the stage door to meet the artists).

☛ Model and teach that hard work, practice, and persistence are all part of being creatively successful.

### *In the Classroom*

☛ Teach students through concepts and relationships, in context and metacognitively. Many areas of the curriculum should provide strategy lessons and strategy application (Mumford, 1998; Starko, 2005; VanTassel-Baska, 1998). The discovery method is less effective at the beginning, because students’ lack of knowledge about strategies interferes with learning, but can be utilized as expertise grows.

☛ Teach students to recognize and clarify problems and new ideas, reorganize knowledge, purposely seek alternatives, evaluate ideas and solutions, and monitor their own activity. Encourage them to find problems instead of always providing them with problems (Runco & Nemiro, 1994). Build in them a tolerance for ambiguity and deferred judgment.

☛ Evaluate and praise creative production honestly (children know if the praise is false), specifically (“I like the way you used blue to set the mood,”

vs. "That is the most beautiful picture in the world."), and positively (show you appreciate the effort). Runco (1992) noted that creative people are more naturally self-evaluative, but that support and positive, honest evaluation from others is crucial.

☛ Use biographies and fiction of creative people to inspire and provide a point of identification for children. This can be especially effective for females, children of minority groups, nonathletic males, and any child who has experienced rejection and misunderstanding because of his or her giftedness (VanTassel-Baska, 1996).

### *At School*

☛ Use multiple ways of identifying creative talent and what a student needs, and include instruments that measure skills; self-report data on feelings, interests, and aspirations; observations by parents and teachers; and evaluation of productivity and performance.

☛ Provided flexible scheduling so that students can enroll in classes that meet their specific needs (perhaps two art classes and band).

☛ Set expectations that both the home and the classroom will be places that value creative thinking and work. Let children see their parents and teachers do creative work of their own, talk positively about people who create, give girls and boys equal opportunities in all creative endeavors, and give children time to think, experiment, and resolve the disequilibrium of creative work.

☛ Support creatively gifted children with counseling, if needed, as they search for their identities and places in their schools, families, and careers. Torrance's (1962, 1988) work over the decades confirmed the necessity of these kinds of supports. He believed that children who lacked them could become physically and psychologically ill.

If creativity is a swampy concept, as Piirto says, it is worth braving the alligators. Creative works enhance all our lives and bring fulfillment to those who create.

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