



Developing Creativity

Dana H. Davidson
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

One of the most exciting findings about creativity is that it may be picked up at almost any stage of the life cycle and developed. Many programs that work with elderly or retired people have known this for a long time. Researchers are continually trying to understand what creativity is and how it can be nurtured throughout childhood and adulthood. It is thought that developmental characteristics of creative aspects vary to the extreme; some things may show up early, other aspects later on in life. Creative behaviors such as curiosity may actually be evident early during infancy and increase during the “magic years” of early childhood. Unfortunately, during middle and late childhood there may be a decrease in creativity as children become more conforming and inhibited as well as liable to fall into sex-role stereotypes. With care, creativity can be sustained throughout childhood and adulthood. Following are highlights of several characteristics of creative people and suggested ways to develop creativity.

Characteristics that signal creativity include intense absorption, curiosity, ability to put together seemingly unrelated things or ideas, sense of humor, unusual vocabulary, eagerness to share new discoveries, spontaneity, and willingness to consider new ideas. Creative people are often either interested in ongoing experiments and need time to pursue ideas in depth, or they may jump from idea to idea very quickly. They may show fluency and flexibility in their thinking. They may ask surprising questions. They may be more independent than others in their approach to doing things. They get excited about new solutions and ideas.

Creative people need time to entertain ideas, prepare materials, and let their ideas simmer for awhile. They need privacy and tolerance for ambiguity. They need to be allowed to try things out in different ways

until they are satisfied with their own work. They also need to be able to select and discard efforts of their choosing—pressure to produce may stifle their creative efforts. Creativity thrives in an environment that allows questions, exploring, observing, skill-building (even Michelangelo had to practice!), communicating, and self-expression. To develop creativity, the home or classroom environment should contain a variety of materials and encourage lots of different experiences.

Developing a childhood interest—being “in love” with something and sticking with it for some time—is related significantly to adult creative achievement. Building anticipation before a trip or lesson, digging deeply into material during the lesson, and keeping the ideas alive for some time after the lesson are also ways to keep the creative processes going. Children and adults need to be introduced to examples of creative excellence. Their own work should be recognized and truly appreciated. If possible, creative efforts should be put to work and not simply acknowledged and then shelved.

Adults who experience creativity programs tend to experience dramatic improvements in the quality of their lives. Self-expression, the zest of discovery, the pleasure of creating something, and freedom to try new things are all aspects of the creative process. Children can be encouraged to grow creatively, and this does not interfere with other kinds of educational achievement. We can all grow with the further development of creativity.

References

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