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# Creativity in the Classroom

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nonhandicapped children and most will learn in a similar style. They all have personalities and will experience such emotions as love, fear, anger, and anxiety. Of course there is variability within the group of individuals referred to as handicapped as there is in any group of individuals. They are not a homogeneous group of individuals as some have inferred, but rather a heterogeneous one. It is logical to assume that *no* group, including the handicapped is uniform and conforming. Being handicapped or nonhandicapped is often a question of how we respond to those environmental demands placed upon us, matching our strengths and weaknesses to the situation. Within the group of handicapped individuals, there are some who do not fulfill our expectations. They are significantly different from the mainstream with regards to either or both physical attributes and behaviors. It is difficult to mask their characteristics and they do, quite frequently, reinforce those stereotypes which we hold towards the handicapped.

Fortunately, though, it is not a matter of qualitative differences in that each type of handicap has its own distinct personality and behavioral characteristics. But rather it is as Hallahan and Kauffman (1978) suggest, a difference in degree with regards to behavior rather than a difference in kind of behavior.

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## CREATIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

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It has always concerned me that some children dislike school. I believe these years should be some of the happiest of their life. (I think most of us will agree that a happy childhood will help develop a mentally healthy adult.) When I have observed many children playing school, I must say in most cases they seem to portray the teacher as sort of bossy and mean. I am afraid we try to tell them how to do too many things they could figure out creatively. (One young boy was asked upon returning home from school in September what he had learned that day. He quickly replied, "Absolutely nothing--the teacher talked all day.")

It seems that the very institution (the school) that should promote creativity succeeds in squashing this important element in most children. Many kindergarten and first grade children seem to have completely lost much of their creative ability by the time they get to the third or fourth grade. (I have taught third and fourth grades.) It seems that most third and fourth graders (as well as many other students) want their teacher to tell them exactly how something should be done. Many times I have told students, "Don't ask me how to work something out, use your own brain, you have about worn mine out." It seems that most children would rather please than take a chance on their own creative ideas. They are working for good grades you know.

A story is told of a first grade teacher observing her students during art period. She noticed that Johnny was very busy at his



Miss Thurman and Laura Wilder, Daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Jerry Wilder.

freehand art. She stopped by his desk and asked what he was drawing. He said, "Heaven" as he continued to work. The teacher said no one knows what heaven looks like! he replied, "They will know when I finish."

I believe our children must have a good foundation in the basics. They must learn the multiplication tables. There seems to be no other way. I am convinced we must put more emphases on the basics, but I believe we must also give students sometime during the day to be creative. (Creativity should not be confused with special talents. It is believed that except for the very, very dullest most everyone has creative ability.) All students need is a chance and encouragement to use and develop their creative ability. Creativity does not have to be original. Our idea or interpretation of something is our creative ability. Many outstanding writers used ideas from others in their writing.

After you read to a class or group of students they might write what they think happened before or after the story. (I once had a third grade girl write 16 pages after I finished reading Garth Williams', *The Adventures of Benjamin Pink*.)

Children like to write poetry. This seems to be an easy way to start. Publishers are asking for materials written by children. Many will pay well.

I realize there has to be some conformity in a classroom with a large number of students, but from experience I think a time for creativity will help make for a happy group of students. We are more receptive and learn faster if we are happy, and it is better for our health to stay as happy as possible.

Children enjoy puppetry, chalk talks, (All children like to write and draw on the board. I have found this is an easy way for children

to relax as they tell their original stories.) shadow play, pantomime and creative dramatics. Over the years, I have found I do not have discipline problems with children if I allow them to enjoy creative dramatics and other such activities. They will work like trojans to finish assigned work if they are allowed to do something they thoroughly enjoy. I believe our democratic society demands we help develop future citizens who will be able to think and speak on their

feet without fear—and with joy. Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote, "As you encourage the growth of artistic achievement through the medium of creative drama, you strengthen the cultural life of our nation and all nations. The inclusion of the arts in the education of children contributes to the enrichment of mankind."

After reading the following poem by Joy Wilt—I felt sad—as the message seemed to be so true.

#### "THE LITTLE GIRL\* WITH MAGICAL POWERS"

Once upon a time  
a long time ago  
there lived a little girl  
a very special girl  
a girl with magical powers

The little girl would look up into the sky  
and while others only saw clouds  
she could see  
the fairyland there  
with all of the fairies busy at work and play  
and she knew  
that the fairyland was a very secret place  
a place that only she could see  
she had such magical powers

The little girl would find a rock  
and while others saw that the rock  
was nothing special  
she could see  
the tiny flecks of silver and gold  
that were embedded in the surface of the rock  
and she knew  
all about the precious diamond  
that was buried deep inside  
she had such magical powers

The little girl would see a tiny bug  
and while others thought the bug  
was only an insect  
she could see  
that the bug was a funny little character  
with a personality and feelings  
and she knew  
that the bug could talk his own special language  
and think his own special thoughts  
she had such magical powers

The little girl could take an old paper bag  
and while others thought  
that the bag was just another paper bag  
she could make  
a puppet, a purse, a doll  
a basket or a hat  
and she knew  
that the paper bag could be  
anything she wanted it to be because  
she had such magical powers

Every day  
the little girl grew  
until she was big enough  
to go to school

One day during recess  
the little girl found a quiet spot  
on the grassy playground and lay down.

She was watching the fairies busily at work  
in their fairyland.  
"What are you looking at?" a friend asked.  
"The fairies in fairyland," the little girl said.  
The friend looked at the clouds and then  
looked at the little girl.  
"Those aren't fairies," he said, "Those  
are only clouds."  
"Oh," thought the little girl  
and so she learned that clouds were only clouds.

Then one day during show-and-tell  
the little girl shared her favorite rock.  
"This rock is a special rock" she said  
"It's covered with gold and silver  
and it has a diamond inside."  
The teacher came closer and examined the rock.  
"That's not gold and silver," she said.  
"That's only iron pyrate and mica."  
"Oh," thought the little girl.  
And so she learned that the sparkles in her rock  
were only iron pyrate and mica.

Then one day on her way to school  
the little girl found a small red ladybug.  
She gently picked up the bug and said  
"How are you today?"  
"That bug can't talk," jeered one of her friends.  
"He's only a bug, and bugs can't talk."  
"Oh," thought the little girl.  
And she learned that bugs were only bugs.

Then one day after lunch  
the little girl emptied her lunch bag  
and placed it on her hand.  
"How are you today?" the girl asked the bag  
that had become a puppet.

The teacher on lunch duty interrupted  
"Who are you talking to?"  
"My friend," the little girl answered,  
pointing to the paper bag.  
"That's nothing but a paper bag," the teacher said.  
"Oh," said the little girl.  
And she learned that paper bags could only be  
paper bags.

As the little girl continued to grow  
she learned many things.  
She learned as all intelligent people do  
that things are only what they really are.

And she also learned that  
she was just an ordinary girl  
with no magical powers.

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numerous books and related materials.

\*or we could say boy