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## Introduction

Have you ever watched young children at play and noticed how they use toys in different ways? They do not think of the intended purposes of the toys. They use them as props. A book is a tunnel for cars, or used to balance on heads, pile for steps, cut, color, or throw. Have you ever listened to a young child describe a physical phenomenon? "The sun is following me. It chases me wherever I go. Everywhere, look." "When my sister plays the piano, it sounds like the music is dancing all around." Have you ever come face to face with a young child's inventiveness when confronted with a "crime"? "I didn't draw on the wall. My friend Tickeroo did. I told him not to. I took his crayons away and pushed him out the window." The child is not only original but able to elaborate beautifully on a theme.

What happens to free interpretation of the environment as the child enters school? Experience contradicts original perceptions. For example: the sun is not moving. We move around the sun. Social pressure forces conformity. Brothers, sisters, and friends laugh at the absurdity of an imaginary friend. Criticism from the environment curtails originality. "Take that book off your head. Books are to read." Finally, the imaginative child enters school and perhaps encounters a classroom like this:

The little boy went first day of school  
He got some crayons and started to draw  
He put colors all over the paper  
For colors are what he saw  
And the teacher said...What are you doing, young man?  
I'm painting flowers, he said.  
She said...It's not time for art, young man  
And anyway flowers are green and red  
There's a time for everything, young man  
And a way it should be done  
You've got to show concern for everyone else  
For you're not the only one.  
And she said...Flowers are red, young man  
Green leaves are green  
There's no way to see flowers any other way  
Than the way they always have been seen.

written by Harry Chapin  
1978 Elektra/Asylum Records

This is an extreme example of what might happen in school; however, we think it is a good starting point for discussing the creative process and why primary teachers should integrate creativity into

their school programs. We must nourish the creative seed and watch it grow so we have silver bells and cockle shells but not all in a row.

Young children come to school with personality traits conducive to creativity. What happens along the way? In order to nourish creativity we must have a common understanding of what creativity is. According to Donald MacKinnon, creativity has four aspects: the product, the person, the process, and the situation.

Until school, a child's learning is primarily informal. Then, the school becomes the environment for most of the child's day. A more formal approach to learning occurs. Children must learn the rules of the classroom. They must learn the correct way to write their names, the correct way to fill in a worksheet. They must learn to follow directions in a group game. From an informal world of learning the children arrive in an atmosphere which requires one right answer, the single, correct way of doing things. There are so many rules and directions to follow that the child may no longer be comfortable in situations having little structure and no right answer.

Primary grade teachers have a triple responsibility. First, you must train the children to think convergently, to come to a common conclusion, to arrive at the right answer. After all, creative spelling is not acceptable. Second, you must provide opportunities for the children to think divergently, arriving at many different, unusual ideas. Finally, you must teach the children to understand the difference between the two types of thinking and when each is appropriate.

If we are to foster creativity, we must know some strategies that will help children develop skills in productive thinking. Thus, the main emphasis of this book: how to make creativity an integral part of the classroom.

A construct is helpful when we look at creativity and how to manage it in a classroom. The construct can help us organize, build, and evaluate. It can offer a hook on which to hang our ideas. It allows us to direct activities and expectations in a purposeful way without falling into the supermarket trap of buying one of everything on the shelf simply because it is there. It makes sense to look for a construct that takes into account the dimensions that define the classroom.

What form does the construct take? For us, three strands stand out: the environment, the student and the content. Through action, interaction, and reaction these three strands create the educational situation and bring learning to life. In order to show their interaction, it is important to understand each strand.

The first component, environment, deals with the setting and the strategies which help develop the creative process. What kind of environment encourages children to think creatively and to solve problems?

Strand two, the student, has two parts: the affective and the cognitive. Important to the affective area are the feelings that allow or prevent the student's response. A willingness to examine open-ended or unanswered problems, a readiness to take a chance, a comfort with not knowing, and a desire to investigate are all included in the affective domain. All children have the potential to act in these areas, but they may not act equally well in each. The ability to respond in a creative manner requires a person to do more than passively receive and restructure ideas. Creativity is an active process requiring involvement—a rising to the occasion. The affective domain relates to an emotional readiness to deal with unknowns, questions, and challenges.

The cognitive strand contains the intellectual areas that allow a person to play with ideas and to act creatively. The first step is for the student to become fluent. Fluency is the ability to go beyond the initial idea, to break away from the "one right answer" assumption, to go beyond the initial idea to many ideas for solutions. The next step requires the student to change the direction of thought

## Are You Ready?

Creativity in the classroom does not have to be threatening or an added burden; it can be fun, exciting, and rewarding to you. Creativity can be a mood in the room which livens every day. It can enhance curriculum, increase motivation, and enrich the environment. A classroom that fosters creativity is an exciting place to learn. It transforms the learning environment into a laboratory which encourages students to experiment with ideas and celebrate their fulfillment. You will find that the children will become more active in the learning process and enjoy it more. Confidence will develop as the children feel more and more comfortable testing their own ideas. Group dynamics will improve as the children share ideas with each other and gain respect for individual differences among themselves. They can work together improving ideas, gaining skill in looking at situations from many perspectives. You, too, will benefit because the children will share responsibility for the classroom. A variety of projects will begin to emerge, and if the children are truly involved, there will be less policing needed. You can become a learner and enjoy discovery with the children. The kinds of lessons learned will be relevant and applicable to everyday life. Most important, the children in the class will be motivated to learn.

Perhaps you are thinking, "I'm not creative, so how can I have a creative classroom? I can't think of those clever ideas." If so, you have fallen prey to the "It looks good on paper syndrome." You are not alone. Many teachers will agree that benefits do exist in having a creative classroom but feel totally inadequate in providing such an environment. They are plagued with concerns such as "I'm not creative," "Where do I begin?," "Are the children ready for this?," and "Am I ready for this?" It is important to look at some of these concerns before moving from paper to practice.

