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DEVELOPING CREATIVITY IN READING

Myrtie M. Barnhardt

Have you ever heard a teacher make the remark, "I just can't teach my children to be creative?" It makes one wonder just what *that* teacher means by "being creative." Is creativity taught in a certain pattern step by step? Applegate in her book, *Helping Children Write*, says, "Creativity cannot be taught. It can only be released and guided by a competent teacher."⁽¹⁾ It is often difficult for children to reveal what is on the inside, for they have been disappointed by adults too often when they have exposed their feelings to them. One of the important facts that teachers and children should realize is that everyone of us has some sort of a gift within us and it is up to us to bring that gift forth. We must stand our ground and refuse to be suppressed by anyone. This point should suggest to us that the first step in guiding children to be creative is to establish good rapport between student and teacher. Creativity in reading may be established in several ways—by writing experience stories together as a group, by playing listening-and-seeing games, by dramatizing pictures and plays, and by writing imaginative stories or poems.

Experience Stories

Experience stories are a good starting place in creative reading because children enter the first grade bubbling over with enthusiasm in wanting to learn to read. The suppressing of creativity in reading, however, can start at this point if the teacher is not fully prepared. She must establish a satisfactory introduction for her pupils by building background and by arousing curiosity and interest. This can be done by relating some of her past experiences, showing illustrative pictures, telling a story, or by having the children relate some of their past experiences. When children finally get the feel of it, the ideas on the inside of them start tumbling forth, and under the guidance of the teacher a story of their own unfolds before them.

Listening-and-Seeing Games

A technique for developing imagery which may be used for reading readiness in both the kindergarten and first grade is playing listening-and-seeing games. For example: Ask children to close their eyes and tell what they see when they hear the word *house*. Then say, someone is about to knock on the door. Who is it? What is the person

wearing? What does he want? This type of fantasy helps a child create visual images of his own. Or, for the listening game, suggest to the child that he is sitting on a bench at the zoo. Ask him what noises he hears. This game can help him develop his auditory imagery.

Dramatizations

Dramatization can also be used in developing creativity in reading. This can be done by using stories that are short and simple or by "scene playing." In "scene playing" everyone can participate by dramatizing one action of a character until they actually feel the role they are playing and do not step out of character. Or children may act out picture-stories from readiness books, sometimes in pantomime, sometimes with improvised dialogue. It depends much on one's group when deciding upon the length of the dramatization. As first graders get into their pre-primers, it is possible to act out one line at a time and attain success. A child can retell a story from the point of view of one of the characters making the particular points the character would make and using the specific gestures that he thinks the character would use to tell his story. Older children can find a story they would like to dramatize, read it to their group and have them evaluate it. After one of the stories has been chosen by the group, it can be acted out, paying particular attention to facial expressions and actions to show how the students think the characters actually feel. The use of these methods of dramatization gives a purpose to reading which is an important aim often overlooked by teachers. Dramatization not only gives reading a purpose, but it teaches a child how to interpret to an audience the author's meaning, to speak plainly and to use the voice skillfully. It contributes to language development by giving the child opportunity to think on his feet and to express ideas readily. A child obtains a great deal of mental content from this type of reading and considerable poise in speaking.

Original Stories and Poems

Probably the most difficult creative technique for teachers is to promote motivation for the writing of original stories and poems. This procedure is one that may be started as early as the first grade. It is also one that is most frequently misused by teachers. Often a teacher will give an assignment in the following manner, "For reading today write a story about anything in which you are interested." Was any form of motivation used in this assignment? A teacher needs to guide children into writing by creating in them a desire to express

themselves on paper. In the lower grades children need much help in getting started in this type of writing, especially in spelling. Many children are learning phonetic sounds and principles. Should they be made to stop and think about how the word starts, how it ends, and the phonetic principles involved in the spelling of the word? If they were made to do this, their train of thought would be interrupted and lost completely. There is a specific time and place for all things. A teacher can use one of two methods when a child asks how to spell a word; write it on the board for him or have each child place on his desk a small pad on which the teacher writes any word requested. This list of words can be utilized as an individual spelling lesson for the following week. A question often asked by teachers is: "Should a creative story be corrected?" It is generally agreed among teachers interested in developing creativity that it must not be corrected, unless there is a purpose for so doing. In the writer's opinion, a story should be corrected if it is to be used for a bulletin board display or kept permanently in a book made by the child. A teacher may be tempted to ask, "If you do not correct a child's mistakes, how will he learn the correct procedure of writing?" Usage training is best provided by ear and speech exercises. If a teacher places more emphasis upon freedom of expression in writing, the child gradually learns the basic fundamentals as he increases his writing repertoire. If a child seems to be having difficulty with his writing, his teacher can sit down with him and they can go over his story. The mistakes the child does not discover for himself can be pointed out by the teacher.

A creative teacher does not try to put her ideas into children's minds when she is encouraging them to write stories and poetry. She tries to plant the seeds from which creative poetry may grow. One of the best ways to do this is by reading many poems to the group. She can find out from their reactions which type of poetry they like the best and give them plenty of it. She can encourage children to notice the color of the sky, the formation of the clouds, the color of the leaves and other things unique and beautiful around them. This will help them to become more appreciative and will plant those seeds from which creativity grows.

Conclusions

Creativity in reading can be developed if we, as teachers, remember that good teaching is not entirely an act of instruction. Good teaching is also a process of uncovering and encouraging insight, feeling and thinking on the part of others.

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