

FACILITATING CREATIVITY WITHIN A HUMANISTIC ORIENTATION

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Abraham Maslow, Erich Fromm, and Rollo May, three noted humanistic psychologists, have presented similar theoretical positions regarding the nature of creativity. The purposes of this paper are to (a) briefly review the major tenets of the positions espoused by the above theorists, (b) suggest how these tenets precipitate a framework upon which to build a general approach to facilitating creative expression, and (c) outline specific steps which a teacher may follow in implementing that approach.

Maslow (1959) has stressed the role of integration, self-consistency, unity, and wholeness in the creative process. The creative person, according to Maslow, integrates diverse information and emotions, has a consistent "self" based on internal evaluation, is an integral part of — not separate from — his world of experience, and participates in his experiences completely and totally. In short, Maslow sees the ability to create as arising from a high level of mental health. The self-actualized individual expresses himself in unique and creative fashion as the natural manifestation of an innate need for self expression. As a person's basic needs (e.g., physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem) are met, it is his innate predisposition to seek needs at a higher level. The need to create is one of these higher level needs. While Maslow recognized the existence of "special talent" or conventional creativity, he is much more concerned with self-actualizing creativity.

Fromm (1959) has defined creativity as a two factor phenomenon — product and attitude. Product creativity is exemplified by the development of something new which can be seen or heard by others (e.g., a painting, sculpture, symphony, poem). This type of creativity is molded by factors such as talent, study, practice, and social/economic conditions. Attitude creativity, on the other hand, is a character trait involving the ability to "see", to be aware, and to respond. Fromm has focused attention on five conditions necessary for the development of attitude creativity:

1. The capacity to be puzzled, surprised or filled with wonder at events which other persons take for granted.
2. The ability to concentrate, to do one thing at a time giving it full attention.
3. The experiencing of "I", of self — to feel a sense of identity.
4. The ability to accept conflict and tension and to deal with it in an appropriate intellectual and emotional fashion.
5. The willingness to "be born everyday", to have the faith and courage to let go of established states, to be different, to stand in isolation.

May (1959) has defined creativity as the process of bringing something new into birth. He has stated that "creativity is the most basic manifestation of man's fulfilling his own being in his world" (May, 1959,

p. 57). Creative persons express being itself. The process is an enlargement of human consciousness. Creativity involves an encounter in which the person is absorbed into the act. It may or may not be a volitional effort, but it is determined by degree of absorption, intensity, and the specific quality of engagement. May has described two types of creativity. "Talent" involves a much lower level of intensity in the encounter whereas true creativity requires deep commitment and a feeling of joy which accompanies it. "Creativity is the encounter of the intensively conscious human being with his world" (May, 1959, p. 68).

Maslow, Fromm and May have each outlined a humanistic theory of creativity. The theories are similar in two important aspects:

1. Each recognizes two types of creativity, a lower level ("talent") which may be trained and a higher level which is a natural product of a high degree of mental health and well being.
2. Each believes that the higher level of creativity is potentially available to all persons.

In noting the similarities among the basic ideas of humanistic theorists Kolesnik (1975) has stated

Humanists are inclined to the position that man is naturally, inherently, good, that is, trustworthy, friendly, dependable, well-intentioned, predisposed to be helpful, capable of choosing wisely and of regulating his own life. In fact, man is not only capable of, but is striving toward, a kind of moral perfection (p. 36).

In applying this idea to the development of creativity Gowan, Morrison, Groth, Pasternack and Drake (1969) have said: "Creativity is not a rare experience accessible only to genius. It is a natural and indeed inevitable outcome of intelligent mind when certain desirable conditions of mental health are sufficiently present" (p. 103).

If we accept, then, the premise that every mentally healthy person is capable of experiencing creativity, the question logically arises: "How can a teacher facilitate creativity among students?" The answer, in its simplest form, consists of two overlapping steps: (a) removing factors which may interfere with the creative process, and (b) providing an environment which is conducive to the expression of creativity.

Gallagher (1975) has discussed what he has termed "some major ways often mentioned by teachers to stamp out creativity. . ." (p. 253). These include (a) establishing a rigid curriculum, including a limited time in which to present the required material, (b) teaching in content areas where the instructors are not well versed, (c) accepting one source (usually the textbook) as the *only* source of valid information, and (d) refusing to allow discussion or evaluative statements from students.

However, for creativity to flourish a student must be free, to a considerable extent, from lower level needs. Physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs must be adequately met in order for self-actualization needs to emerge. The responsibility of the teacher, then, is to arrange an environment in which the lower level needs are met. Hunger, fear of failure or fear of teachers, feelings of estrangement, feelings of low self worth all interfere with the natural creative process. According to Rogers (1954), a person can be creative only when he feels a sense of psychological safety and freedom. Expanding upon his original idea Rogers (1969) wrote:



Independence, creativity, and self-reliance are all facilitated when self-criticism and self-evaluation are basic and evaluation by others is of secondary importance. The best research organizations, in industry as well as in the academic world, have learned that creativity blossoms in an atmosphere of freedom" (p. 163).

In summary then, creativity is facilitated when lower level needs are met and the student is then placed in a psychologically free, non-critical environment.

Much has been written regarding specific suggestions that teachers may follow in facilitating creativity among students. Many of these suggestions fit well into a humanistic model. Biehler (1974) has partially quoted and partially paraphrased the following suggestions from Torrance (for a more complete discussion of the topic see E. P. Torrance's *Guiding Creative Talent*):

1. "Value creative thinking." Be on the alert for new ideas, and encourage your pupils to develop all their creative talents.
2. "Make children more sensitive to environmental stimuli."
3. "Encourage manipulation of objects and ideas."
4. "Teach how to test systematically each idea." Starting as early as the third grade, show pupils how to define a problem and keep testing each idea. . . Heuristics. . . might be used as a guide.
5. "Develop tolerance of new ideas." This includes tolerance of unorthodox — and perhaps irritating — creative personalities.
6. "Beware of forcing a set pattern."
7. "Develop a creative classroom atmosphere" — a free, relaxed, unharried one.
8. "Teach the child to value his creative thinking." Encourage students to note their ideas in concrete form whenever possible, perhaps in a special notebook set aside for that purpose.
9. "Teach skills for avoiding peer sanctions." If a highly creative pupil rubs too many classmates the wrong way, help him become more aware of the feelings of others.
10. "Give information about the creative process." You might do this by acquainting students with steps in problem solving. . .
11. "Dispel the sense of awe of masterpieces." Indicate some of the methods and difficulties experienced by famous creative people to dispel the notion that only a gifted few experience brilliant and perfect insight at the first try.
12. "Encourage and evaluate self-initiated learning." Avoid overstructuring the curriculum.
13. "Create 'thorns in the flesh.'" Ask controversial questions, and call attention to disturbing data.
14. "Create necessities for creative thinking." Confront your students with provocative problems . . .
15. "Provide for active and quiet periods." Remember the impact of habitual set and functional fixedness.
16. "Make available resources for working out ideas."
17. "Encourage the habit of working out the full implication of ideas"
18. "Develop constructive criticism" — not just criticism.
19. "Encourage the acquisition of knowledge in a variety of fields."
20. "Develop adventurous-spirited teachers." Try to put these various ideas into practice yourself. (pp. 331-332).

Saltmarsh, Hubele and Canada (1975) have listed a number of concrete suggestions for facilitating humanistic relationships in the classroom. Proposed as "A Taxonomy of Specific Teacher Behaviors", these suggestions — if correctly implemented — should certainly create an atmosphere which will facilitate creativity:

Sit down next to students so that you look directly with them and not down at them.

Look at people when they talk.

Listen and wait rather than talk and interrupt.

If you ever say, "Are there any questions or comments?" WAIT until there is one.

Practice increasing your toleration of periods of silence. Part of the beauty of music is the distribution of silences between expressions. In our opinion, this principle extends deeply into the arts and sciences of human learning

Attend to positive learner behaviors and reduce your frequency of "correcting behaviors."

Practice reducing your sensitivity to errors. (One consequence of this is that you smile more, your eyes will communicate approval more frequently, and you will have more fun.)

Use specific structured activities which facilitate effectiveness of interpersonal relationships.

Refrain from reinforcing inappropriate student behaviors. One technique for accomplishing this is to focus on antecedents and consequences of inappropriate behavior. This will afford data which can also help you in reinforcing appropriate student behavior.

Minimize the grade threat rather than permit it to dominate the culture. Relinquish your territorial imperative on the front of the room.

Move furniture freely and frequently.

Make use of the well-established information that about seven minutes is maximal span for human attention.

Design learning activities so that dramatic use is made of the "people plus people" axiom. (Work in pairs, triads, quarters etc., and change the level and composition of task groups frequently.)

Permit students in small groups to select, design, and execute learning and task activities for the large group.

Give of yourself. This means: Make direct investments in the "Here and Now" rather than relying heavily on the adage: "Someday when you're older, you'll realize. . ." Learn how to effectively receive from learners. Disclose aspects of yourself which are relevant to the living events occurring in the room.

Make it possible for everyone in the room, including yourself, to seek the truth.

Give productive feedback — observations and descriptions — not evaluations or judgments. *Constructive* awareness is the result of observations and descriptions which are based on sensory perceptions. This kind of awareness expands possibilities for growth. *Constrictive* awareness is the result of critiques and judgments which are based on value systems. This kind of awareness orients a person toward the occurrence of error, and much energy is devoted to the avoidance of mistakes. The consequence is frequently a shrinking view of the living process and thus a constriction of the experimentation necessary for growth.

Finally, please know deeply that since you are a person and they are persons — all of whom possess moods, strengths, irrationalities, biases, inabilities, and an abundance of fears — consistency in the learning culture is a myth! (pp. 230-231).

While the above suggestions are excellent in terms of facilitating personal interaction and producing an environment conducive to creativity, they should not be followed in "cook-book" fashion. The teacher must be flexible and innovative with regard to his specific situation if a true facilitative climate is to be achieved.

In summary, Maslow, Fromm and May have proposed humanistic theories which recognize two levels of creativity, the most important of which is accessible to all people and is a natural product of a high



degree of mental health. A teacher can best facilitate creativity in students by seeing that basic needs are met and that a safe, accepting atmosphere is available. Specific suggestions for encouraging creativity have been given by several workers in the field. Many of these suggestions fit comfortably into a humanistic orientation but each teacher must adapt and modify them to meet the unique needs of his class. □

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