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# THE CREATIVE PERSONALITY AND THE IDEAL PUPIL

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There is considerable evidence to indicate that creative personalities tend to be estranged by their teachers or bosses and are not liked very well by them. For example, Getzels and Jackson (1) found that teachers preferred students with high IQs but with less outstanding scores on tests of creative thinking to those with outstanding creativity scores but with less outstanding intelligence quotients. I similarly found (9) that this was also true of elementary pupils and teachers. Jex (4) reported a *negative* relationship between the scores of high school science teachers on a test of ingenuity and ratings by their superiors, and Taylor (8) demonstrated that research workers who are most productive, are rated as producing the most dependable information, and publish the largest number of scientific articles are also named by their supervisors as the ones who would be dropped if cutbacks in personnel were necessary.

These and many other indications concerning the dislike of teachers and bosses for creative personalities set me to wondering what kind of concepts teachers have of the ideal pupil. Knowing that teachers consciously and unconsciously reward pupils in terms of their own ideals, I felt that knowledge about teachers' concepts of the ideal pupil might be useful in understanding the problems of creative personalities and in helping them solve some of these problems. On the basis of a survey of the research dealing with the characteristics of the creative personality, Henrickson and I (3) had already examined the significance of findings con-

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cerning the creative personality for classroom discipline, and my associates and I, concerned about the necessity for rewarding creative thinking in the school, had conducted over 20 experiments trying to test some principles for doing this more successfully. In the course of this research (7), it had become evident that teachers are not able to free the creative capacities of their pupils if their own values do not support creativeness. This was dramatically shown when we asked teachers to describe incidents in which they had rewarded creative thinking. It was painfully evident from these data that creative behavior had been punished rather than rewarded. The conflicting values of the teacher simply prevented his rewarding such behavior.

### Some Regional Patterns

In approaching the task of finding out what teachers consider an ideal pupil, we were able to make use of a list of 84 characteristics of creative personalities as described in approximately 50 empirical studies comparing the personality characteristics of creative individuals in some field with less creative individuals in the same field. Reducing the list to 62 characteristics and putting them in the form of a checklist, we asked teachers and parents to indicate by a single check the characteristics which they think should be encouraged, by a double check the five characteristics deemed most important, and by a strike-out those characteristics which should be discouraged or punished. By assigning a value of two to double checks, one to single checks, and minus one to strike-outs, an index of desirability was obtained for each characteristic for each group of teachers or parents studied. The 62 characteristics could then be ranked in terms of the values obtained.

Thus far, we have results from 650 teachers in ten different states (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, California, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Nebraska, and Hawaii) and six countries outside the United States (Canada, Aus-

tralia, Germany, Western Samoa, India, and the Philippines). The rank-order coefficients of correlation among the various localities within the United States is very high (around .95). This means that teachers in Minnesota have essentially the same concepts of the ideal pupil as their colleagues in Wisconsin, California, Georgia, and Mississippi. There are, of course, a few interesting differences which reflect important cultural emphases with implications for the development of creative personalities.

For example, teachers in California place a higher value than any other group of teachers on sense of beauty, versatility, adventurousness, vision, and spirited disagreement; they value sincerity and thoroughness rather less. Florida teachers honor energy, industry, and obedience, whereas Georgia teachers place more emphasis on thoroughness. Minnesota teachers want their pupils to be receptive to the ideas of others; Mississippi teachers value the desire to excel, and Wisconsin teachers emphasize the value of being industrious and popular. Nebraska teachers are noteworthy for their emphasis on remembering well, competition, and self-confidence and for their lack of emphasis on curiosity. Negro teachers in Mississippi and Georgia, more than any of the other groups of US teachers, value obedience, having distant goals, and willingness to accept the judgments of authorities; they place less value than other groups on independence in thinking and being well liked by one's peers. They are less punishing of regression and more punishing of spirited disagreement. It must be understood, of course, that no claim is made for the representativeness of the samples.

Although some of the concepts of the ideal pupil seem to hold throughout the world, others vary greatly from culture to culture. For example, remembering well is more highly valued in Western Samoa than in any other culture. Similarly honored are being considerate of others in the United States, being industrious in Canada and Australia, being

**Chapter** persistent and visionary in Germany, and  
**ten** being obedient, courteous, and industrious in India and the Philippines.

But let us center our attention on the ten characteristics most valued by the 650 teachers in the United States. Where appropriate, I shall introduce results from parents and from teachers in other countries. After this, we shall examine the ten characteristics rated as most undesirable and some specific characteristics which have especial significance for the development of creative personalities.

#### **Premium on Conformity**

Both teachers and parents in the United States rank *being considerate of others* as the most important of the 62 characteristics included in the checklist. This great stress on being considerate of others certainly identifies one of the reasons why teachers do not prefer highly creative pupils. Research indicates that highly creative people frequently appear to be lacking in this trait. While they may sacrifice their lives in an effort to help others, to serve their country, or to benefit humanity, they often become so involved in the problems on which they are working and consider these problems so important that they do not have time to be polite and to show the consideration of others that is so highly valued in our society, even in military commanders (2). Placing this characteristic at the top of our hierarchy of values may, however, reflect an over-emphasis on conformity to the thinking of others and could be carried to such an extreme that it could work against the freeing of the creative thinking abilities. Insofar as it reflects a genuine respect for the individuality of each person, it may be a different matter. At any rate, the evidence here identifies one area in which highly creative pupils need help in order to become less obnoxious without sacrificing their creativity.

Second, our sample of US teachers placed *independence in thinking* in the second highest position of importance. Since almost all studies of creative individuals stress the importance of independence of thinking, this widely shared

value should aid in freeing creative intelligence through teaching. Genuine creative accomplishment, however, requires not only *independence of thinking* but *independence in judgment*. The creative individual must be able to make judgments independently and stick to them, even though others do not agree. Any new idea in the beginning always makes its originator a minority of one. We know only too well that being a minority of one makes one uncomfortable. Thus, independence in judgment takes great *courage*.

I regret to say that teachers in the United States do not give a place of great importance to either *independence in judgment* or *being courageous*. Independence in judgment ranks nineteenth and being courageous stands twenty-ninth among teachers in the United States, lower than in any of the other six countries for which we have data. In fact, it is far more important to teachers in the United States for their pupils to be courteous than to be courageous. It is also more important that pupils do their work on time, be energetic and industrious, be obedient and popular or well liked among their peers, be receptive to the ideas of others, be versatile, and be willing to accept the judgments of authorities than to be courageous. Such a set of values is more likely to produce pupils who are ripe for brainwashing than pupils who can think creatively. As Maslow (5) has pointed out, every one of our great creators has testified to the necessity for courage in "the lonely moment of creation, affirming something new (contradictory to the old)." Maslow describes it as "a kind of daring, a going out in front all alone, a defiance, a challenge." The fright is understandable but must be overcome if any creation is to take place.

#### **Responsible Drive**

Strong *determination*, ranked third by United States teachers, is, of course, an important characteristic of the creative person. Someone has suggested that the truly creative personality is likely to be the first to give in but the last to give up.

Although we recognize determination as a "good thing," we tend not to like it when the determination is in opposition to our own will. Thus, determination frequently brings creative individuals into conflict with teachers, employers, and other authorities. This is apparently the kind of determination which characterizes the creative person. He frequently refuses to take no for an answer and drives ahead to test his ideas in spite of discouragement. Perhaps we need to teach some of these determined creative individuals how *to give in* occasionally *without giving up*.

Similarly, creative individuals are never content to work a 40-hour week. They cannot stop thinking and working. In spite of his great *industriousness*, however, and the intensity with which the creative child works, his teachers may regard him as a daydreamer, as lazy, or as inconsistent. Fellow workers may consider creative adults as lazy loafers, daydreamers, or preoccupied with their work. Many highly creative persons do not seem to be industrious because they spend some of their time sitting and thinking, not visibly busy. In order to free the creative thinking abilities, we must admit thinking, a quiet activity, to a status of legitimacy.

Likewise, creative individuals are noted for their *sense of humor*, but their sense of humor does not always endear them to their associates. It is likely to win for them such labels as silly, crazy, clown, cut-up, etc. The treatment accorded creative individuals frequently makes them hostile, and this hostility finds outlet in the form of satire, sarcasm, and other biting types of humor. One would hope that teachers in the United States would be able to appreciate the sense of humor in creative pupils and to help them maintain it without becoming offensive through excessive silliness or hostility. Many creative children need help in reducing their hostility while still maintaining their aggressiveness, independence of judgment, and courage.

The high place assigned to *curiosity* by American teachers is encouraging.

Curiosity is an important element in the creative personality and in the creative process. In our studies (6), we have identified the curious child as the one who, **The creative personality and the ideal pupil**

1. Reacts positively to new, strange, incongruous, or mysterious elements in his environment by moving toward them, by exploring them, or manipulating them;
2. Exhibits a need or desire to know about himself and his environment;
3. Scans his surroundings seeking new experiences, and
4. Persists in examining and exploring stimuli in order to know more about them.

I have had some interesting experiences when I have asked teachers to evaluate their pupils according to this description. They tell me that they have never thought of their pupils in this way before this. When asked to nominate the five most and five least curious pupils in a class, teachers complained that they had to put some of their "best" pupils in the low category. One teacher said, "I feel real bad about putting some of my best students in the low group. They are the best I have in arithmetic and spelling especially. They are not curious, though. They never ask any questions and learn only what I tell them to."

Just as they are curious, creative persons are extremely *sincere*. In this respect, the creative child is likely to find approval from his teacher. Teachers, however, must be careful to pay more than lip-service to sincerity by showing genuine respect for this quality when it occurs, and it is quite difficult for teachers to refrain from punishing sincerity when the sincere thoughts expressed are not the clean and holy ones that we officially approve. Here is a major problem for both teachers and parents in the cultivation of creativity.

Another problem grows out of the fact that the creative child or adult sometimes does not appear to be *courteous*. He may be too busy to be courteous—if not too busy with his hands, too busy

Chapter with his mind. Since courtesy is so highly ten valued in our society, we may have to help the creative child to behave more courteously so that he may survive. Courtesy occupies an equally important place in the concept of the ideal pupil of teachers in India, Canada, the Philippines, and Australia.

*Promptness* is also highly valued in our society, and this frequently involves the creative person in difficulties. Because creativity requires that one permit one thing to lead to another, it often entails the busy pursuit of some exciting and promising idea instead of the meeting of some deadline which is perceived as comparatively unimportant. Teachers need to recognize that there are times when a person may strain mightily for an idea and wish fervently to think of a new idea and still fail through all conscious effort. Then suddenly it just seems to "happen." The tyranny of the clock is a mighty enemy of imaginative thinking. Knowing of no way to escape it, I am happy to find some teachers who are flexible enough at least to lighten its imperiousness.

Although the United States is said to be one of the most clock-oriented countries in the world, it is interesting that parents rank *doing one's work on time* in sixteenth place, compared with ninth for teachers. Teachers in Germany, Canada, and Australia, however, clearly value this characteristic less highly than do US teachers.

Finally, creative individuals are notorious as *self-starters*. It is encouraging that teachers honor this characteristic to the extent that they do. One wonders, however, how much support most teachers give the true self-starter, the one who does not pursue the things his teacher tells him to learn and to do. The kind of self-starting which most of us admire is of a sort which we suggest.

Only German and Canadian teachers and American parents honor this self-starting ability as highly as do US teachers. Negro teachers in the United States and teachers in Samoa, India, Australia, and the Philippines rank this characteristic near the middle of the total list.

### Punished Characteristics

Now let us skip to the bottom of the rankings and examine the ten characteristics which are most frequently punished or discouraged by teachers.

Highly creative individuals *regress occasionally*, appearing to be childish, naive, and playful. Nevertheless, this tendency seems to be essential to the creative personality. Because it is apparently irritating to teachers, we may have to help children to handle this characteristic in such a way that it will make them less obnoxious to others. Teachers may also need to be somewhat more accepting and understanding of this characteristic in creative children. In one of our studies, we found that elementary teachers rated highly creative pupils as less studious and hardworking than their more highly intelligent but less creative classmates. It is interesting, however, that these same highly creative children achieved as high scores on standardized achievement tests (Gates Reading and Iowa Basic Skills) as their high IQ classmates in spite of the fact that their average intelligence as measured by the Stanford-Binet was 25.6 points lower. Such youngsters seem to learn through activities which adults define as regressive or "playing around."

On the other hand, creative individuals live with great intensity; they may be strongly devoted and committed emotionally to an idea or cause, and they often have great openness and awareness. This frequently marks them as being *emotional* or irrational, characteristics which have traditionally been discouraged by education. Creative individuals, however, have learned to accept, value, and use their irrationality. It is apparently the very basis for many of their greatest achievements. The conflict of values here needs to be reconciled if we are to free creative intelligence through teaching.

Despite their intensity, many creative persons are bashful and *timid*—for very good reasons. While some of the world's most creative persons are notoriously shy, their timidity is likely to be confined to their social relationships; they tend to be unusually bold in developing, testing, and

defending their ideas. Again, the truly creative person may be the first to give in but the last to give up, and the timidity of the creative person seems to be of this type.

Nevertheless, creative individuals, while timid, tend to be *critical of others*. The productively creative individual is quite constructive in his criticism, but to free creativity, teachers may have to help pupils quite explicitly to become more constructive in their criticism. In the same way, creative individuals tend to be *stubborn*, posing the problem for teachers of how to maintain pupils' persistence while simultaneously developing their social skills.

In the stubborn pursuit of independent thinking, the creative individual may at times appear to be *negativistic*. Although he is actually likely to be more open to the suggestions of others than less creative people, he is frequently unwilling to take no for an answer, a characteristic which stood out in my own study of American jet aces, a group whom I regard as highly creative. Many teachers interpret this kind of behavior as being undesirably and irritatingly negativistic.

In a similar vein, the highly creative individual may at times seem haughty and self-satisfied, bringing upon himself the dislike of peers and superiors. Because he develops novel ideas which may run counter to accepted notions and practices, the problem may be one of accepting this characteristic but helping the individual to become less annoying in displaying it. A comparable difficulty arises because the productively creative individual is fault-finding, although usually in a constructive way. By definition, the creative individual must challenge established ways of thinking and be able to perceive the defects, the gaps in knowledge, the missing elements. He almost always has some "thorn in his flesh."

Finally, some creative children may appear to be *domineering*, especially when they are creating ideas, and they have an unusual talent for *disturbing existing organization* wherever they find themselves. This, of course, is disturbing

to teachers; it ranks lowest or next-to-lowest in almost all the cultures thus far studied. I believe that this is an essential characteristic of the creative thinker and that if we are to free the creative thinking abilities to develop, we must learn how to accept it, guide it in productive directions, and exploit its values for stimulating learning and thinking in the classroom.

#### Ideals Without Creativity?

Obviously, each teacher needs to ponder the consequences of his ideal of the good pupil. In what ways does it free or shackle the development of the creative abilities of his pupils. It is well to remember with Plato that "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there." Mr. S. Beaty Tanner of Dayton, Ohio, to whom I recently reported some of these observations, reflected upon them and composed a very thought-provoking little statement which he and I have entitled "The Saga of the Declaration of Independence." I offer it as a challenge to thought among all educators:

Once upon a time, before they knew that the ideal pupil is one who above all is courteous, obedient, popular, and receptive to the ideas of others—independent in thinking but coming to no judgments contrary to those of teachers or parents which might put him out of step with contemporary thought and make him maladjusted, insecure, and unloved—there were some men who had been reared without the advantages of present conceptions of what makes a good student and a good citizen.

These odd-balls thought up and wrote a paper they called "The Declaration of Independence"—quite an original document at the time. And what do you think they did next? They signed their names to it, knowing full well that they would be killed if the war associated with it should fail! And their soldiers were farmers, trappers, and smalltown men, all expecting to beat the professional soldiers of the King of England, red-coated men who knew the rules and obeyed them as they should. Should they lose, as was probable, many of the Declarers would die, and those who weren't killed would certainly

make the King and the people of England dislike them.

Well, the outcome broke all the rules, but they won—after a hard fight, and one fought not at all in conventional ways.

That is how this United States got started. Of course, we have improved it a lot since then. Everything now is happily standardized. We have security and can buy everything with a small down payment—except the wholehearted trust, friendship, and support of new nations like ours back in 1776.

I wonder why that is?

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