

Child's Creativity Needs Encouragement

by Lodie Fuller

All senses seem to respond to the joy of creativity. Watch the expression of a child when he has completed his “sculpture” in clay. He sees something wonderful that he alone has produced, out of a ball of pliable material that was just a glob. The same magic exists with drawings and paintings—with first cookies baked and first stitches sewn. Young hearts are never more satisfied than when those small beginning attempts reach a completion—creations of their own.

Miniature composers at the piano are a sight to see, when chubby, little fingers play unrehearsed “melodies” and with masterful abandon. If sheet music is available, that same young musician will imagine that she is reading all the notes, turning the pages appropriately, and sometimes singing along as part of the presentation. When she can freely experiment in this endeavor, she finds it a delightful pleasure to create and use her imagination.

Children will inevitably get lost in what they're doing and need the chance to follow through to completion. If that concentration is interrupted, they experience great frustration and cannot understand the reasoning for this break in their progress. Necessary scheduling by adults sometimes limits time for children to relax into their own personal rhythm. Those timeless moments are so very comfortable for the children, but pressing for the adults, who are obligated to jobs and situations that demand so many hours of their days and nights. Chuck Jones, creator of Wile E. Coyote, the Road Runner, says that children are professionals, too; that their job is to play, to experiment, and to try different things.

Being present for our children, as much as possible, gives them the freedom to reach, to search for answers and results within the safety net of a loving environment. We need not hover, as it will often inhibit their originality or squelch their interest. We need not voice judgment or offer constant praise. When our child brings us a picture that we simply cannot distinguish as anything we are familiar with, we can remark about the lovely color, or acknowledge the length of time taken to do such a picture. However, we must be genuine observers of the work and sincere in our interest. What fun, when that little one volunteers to identify his masterpiece, with a flourish of detail, anticipating our approval.

Encouragement to practice gives the message to beginners that there is support from loved ones to go forward with whatever endeavor is at hand. That process builds confidence for this explorer and allows her to muster faith in herself. She is assured of her freedom of expression. Each accomplishment gives rise to new challenges, new risks, and the desire to look further—to “stretch.” In showing respect for our youngsters' abilities and efforts, we help promote a classroom for their creativity, a setting where they will build self-esteem and feel supported in their dreams of the future.

In the book “Creative Spirit,” authors Daniel Coleman, Paul Kaufman, and Michael Ray write, “Fledgling spirit feeds on encouragement and shrivels with criticism,” and that, “It's best to judge a child's effort according to the child's standards and give praise that will urge the child onward.”

Psychologists now confirm that most children have natural talents for particular activities. It's quite obvious to most parents that their offspring excel in varied skills. When those skillful activities are accepted and supported, talents fairly bloom! It's exciting to watch and listen to the specialties that our children expose to us.

Inner joy fills us when one of our little ones decides to tell his own imaginative story or a two-and-a-half year old "reads" the stories from a book that is so familiar to him, using all the expressive drama needed at each change of page. Another one may be a builder and sit for hours constructing with blocks—deep in thought while placing each block carefully in the structure. Oh, such a sense of worthiness.

Children who love music should be given the chance to hear and feel all kinds of music—offering them the choice to decide what they like or dislike. In most cases, they will find favor with just about any rhythm or volume. When small bodies begin to dance, we see the delight in their movements and expressions. Their gyrations may be coordinated or uncoordinated, but they are creating their own choreography and loving it. It's interesting, too, to watch while a small child plays with bells. Each bell has a tone of its own and offers a soothing tinkle without any structure or pattern. Then two bells will bring great pleasure as they strike a harmony of sorts—a sound that is so interesting to their sensitive ears. These should be little bells—easy on Mom's ears, too.

If a child tends to be a natural kind of leader, with the ability to organize little groups, orchestrate their actions and settle their disputes, a parent will surely wish to foster that gift. My oldest daughter was always the "teacher" and when I suggested that someone else have a turn at the respectable position, her sisters and all the neighborhood children protested with, "We want Cathy to be our teacher!" She had that way of keeping all her students busy—and happy. I still offered an occasional suggestion, but mostly, I made the lunches.

Michael Spock of the Field Museum in Chicago, feels that matching adult skills with children's desires to learn will generate a flow of knowledge and happiness—apprenticeships, so to speak, as were the rule before we had schools. Children learned at the side of an adult—a Mom or Dad, grandparent or friend, benefiting from that person's proficiency. We have almost forgotten the practice, but Mr. Spock believes it can and should be revived, for the sake of children and those who teach.

Our own creativity is nourished by the same processes that we allow our children. We must give ourselves permission to take a risk (not necessarily sky jumping) and find the space to dream. Mental blocks and fears seem to hold us captive, but we can act on our dreams and feel the excitement that our children experience in their uninhibited, headlong rush to experiment. We can begin to feed into our own talents and produce surprising, wonderful results. As our children's eyes sparkle with the joy of their accomplishments, we can share in that magic and learn from each other that creativity is a natural state, a gift to each of us.

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