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In the process of choosing a topic for this speech, my professor, Dr. Fernandez, said to me, "Judy, there are two topics you should avoid. One is sex, the other conformity." My first thought was well, if there is one place where I appreciate conformity it's on the subject of sex. The truth of the matter, of course, is that one subject is dangerous, the other hackneyed. Being rather obstinate, however, I began to wonder if conformity is really a trite subject. It didn't take much investigation to prove that conformity is indeed an ancient topic. In Greek mythology there is a story of a bandit named Procrustes who fitted each of his victims to an iron bed. If they were short he stretched them on a rack, and if they were too long, he amputated their legs at what he considered an appropriate length. He insisted you see, that no one could be any taller or shorter than he. Procrustes may well have been the first of the sick conformists. Although the lengths to which Procrustes went were a bit ridiculous, as you well know the hobgoblin of standardization is still with us. Procrustes insisted on conformity to the same height. We insist on conformity to our own particular standard. Unfortunately, too often this standard turns out to be the average. Perhaps you have noticed, as I have, the readiness with which we accept the common and ordinary and the reluctance with which we admit the unusual and superior. The novel is too often scorned while the expected is applauded.

This drive for uniformity is especially evident in our educational systems today as teachers ignore, or at best overlook, a child's inherent drive to create. Consider if you will these facts. The free use of imagination is relegated to a role of minor importance as the child learns the basic rules and regulations of the educational trade. C-A-T spells cat, raise your hand when you wish to leave the room, i before e, and so on infinitely. In kindergarten hobby horses have been placed out of bounds since school consultants have agreed that they do nothing to foster "group spirit". According to David Reisman of the University of Chicago, today's teacher often stresses the necessity of "adjustment to the group", never questioning whether the adjustment to a particular group is of any value.

It is my contention that the unique qualities in the personality of each individual child are rare and precious things that should be carefully nurtured rather than compressed into the narrow confines of our standardized, computer-oriented society. More and more there is pressure for conformity that must be resisted by both parents and teachers in order to make the child emerge as a distinct individual with his own unique goals, each possessing something he alone can contribute. Creative experiences, therefore, are vital for they are based upon the importance of one's individuality.

It is the fact that what one creates is different from what anyone else creates that makes creativity of value. Creative work says to the creator, "What you think and do is important. It is important because you can do it." Take for example, the case of the elementary school music teacher who had in her class a student who was blind. The only creative activity in which she could participate and enjoy was music. She was, in fact, musically talented, with a good ear for pitch and a nice vocal quality. This girl was taken out of her music class, which meant removing her entirely from all active musical experience. She was put into a remedial course of another sort. No doubt this student needed the remedial course, but she also needed music! For without this, the girl was being robbed of the one creative



experience she had, which allowed her to think that what she was doing was important. Her one individual, creative contribution. Obviously such creativity, dealing with the importance of individuality, can not flower in the barren atmosphere of standardization and unquestioning conformity.

We know from studies at the University of Michigan that a child learns more efficiently and with a higher degree of understanding when he approaches problems creatively rather than when he is handed the solutions. He investigates ideas and materials, discovers relationships, combines ideas, tests the soundness of his decisions, discards ideas that don't withstand tests and makes his own generalizations. The creative process then develops certain habits and patterns of thought.

To many authorities, creativity means "to bring into being; to cause to exist." To me this word "create" implies a sense of order. The book of Genesis records: "In the beginning God created . . ." implying God's bringing into existence an orderly universe. Indeed, all selection and arrangement of lines, colors, shapes, movements, thoughts or ideas so that they seem orderly to an individual person is concerned with creativity on the human level. My father who is head of the music education department at Northwestern University, has often told me that some of the saddest children he has seen are those who have, from the very beginning a tremendous desire for self-expression. They want to sing, but they are incapable of arranging and selecting the notes in an order to please them. If the child is provided a background of knowledge, inspiration and an atmosphere suitable for this thoughtful activity, he will do the rest.

Moreover, creativity is essential because it is through creative outlets that we have an insight into the child's mind. How can we know that the thoughts, ideas and words that are constantly being thrust at a child have any meaning for him what-so-ever, unless he is given a chance to express his understanding of them in words other than the very words given him? In a second grade Sunday school class there was a little boy, Dave, who all his life had been taught that "God is love." One particular Sunday the minister of the church came to the class and noticed a crayola drawing which the boy had done. "I like it," the minister said. "I like the way you have drawn me and I like the pulpit. But why did you put candles in the picture? There are no candles in our church." The boy replied, "Those are not candles; those are the lights in heaven. That's not a pulpit; that's God's throne. That's not you, that's God." This child could say or write "God is love", but did the idea have any real meaning for him? It is important that we teach children ideas, but it is more important to find out whether a child understands them. Through creative expression to discover whether or not words and ideas are meaningful to the child as he relates them to his experience.

One of the most pressing problems in our country today is the need for new creative talent. It is not enough that we train engineers, scientists, technologists and mathematicians. What is demanded are more creative individuals. In general education it seems unlikely that to master books, memorize principles, statistics and laws will be enough. Real progress is not made by demonstrating the validity of someone else's ideas. Real progress is made by contributing new ideas -- new concepts.

The elementary school must become one of the major stepping stones in the development of this new creative talent. For, as the University of Michigan Research Center has proven, unless creative approaches are fostered in children before the age of ten, they are destined to be lost forever.

For these reasons then we must initiate in all schools a creative arts program which includes not only art, music and dance, but also creative writing and drama. Creative dramatics is especially effective for it involves not just thinking but feeling, seeing and being. But creativity should not be applied only to the arts. It must be applied to any and every area of learning. It is the key to the success of the nation and to the successful development of the unique qualities of the individuals of the nation. Let us not fit children to Promustes bed to conform to the standard. Let them be free to create.

Conformity may indeed be a trite of hackneyed subject. But it is a subject which we must constantly be appraising. What better place to wage war against the limitations of conformity than in the formative stages of education? What better method than to foster creativity?