

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION
IN ART TO THE EMERGING SELF-CONCEPT
OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILD

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This study was made to explore the effect self-expression in art has upon the emerging self-concept of the elementary school child. It was desirable to know: (1) how research has linked behavior and attitudes to the self-concept, (2) what effect creative activity has upon the behavior and self-concept of the elementary school child, (3) if artistic expression as creative activity fosters desirable behavioral outcomes.

The study was involved with an analysis of data secured from studies made in the area of human behavior, an interpretation of current points of view, attitudes, and beliefs which pertain to the topic, and a review of the opinions of experts in their fields. It investigated some existing theories relating to the self-concept and origins of self with concern for the relationship between overt behavior and the underlying psychological state of the individual. Those theorists who received particular attention were Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Prescott Lecky. Results of a study made by Arthur Jersild in his efforts to better understand the self-concepts of young people were reviewed. The significance of the personal student-teacher relationship upon the student's being was considered. Focus was largely upon the healthy child and individual.

In determining the relationship of creative achievement to the personality, the writer was concerned with the identification of psychological traits one would associate with creative people. Paul Torrance, an expert and research person in this field was a prime source of information. The effect of expressive art activity (an area of creative achievement) upon the personality received attention.

Because of the subjective nature of the topic, no attempt was made to arrive at a quantitative evaluation of the extent of the effect of creative art expression on the emerging self-concept. There were positive indications, however, that this connection existed. The following are some of the conclusions. Accumulating clinic and research knowledge has made it evident that with the proper psychotherapeutic relationship an individual will tend to identify with and accept his subjective feelings; he will undergo changes in perception of self with increased maturity in behavior, become more self-confident, self-reliant, and able to meet situations creatively. Likewise, self-expression in art has a unifying effect upon the personality. In an environment of psychological safety, where a child is free to express himself creatively, and stimulated to identify with his experiences, he comes to accept his subjective feelings and is free to discover his changing self in the changing environment.

Self-acceptance tends to lead to wholeness and integration within the personality resulting in greater creativity.

Creative and mentally healthy people tend to be more self-accepting, open to experience, spontaneous, self-confident, and independent, than the average person, and they have stronger self-concepts. When a teacher is able to identify with a young creator and his experiences as if they were her own, when she is able to be sensitively aware of and accept her own experiences, then she is in the position to offer a helping relationship to the student. This is the relationship which can help him grow and develop.