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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



CREATIVITY – Why it's so important



I remember being amazed to hear that creativity is a much better predictor of achievement in life than IQ. That came out of the research of thousands of children followed for decades after taking the Torrance Creativity Test.

We've certainly seen how important creativity is this past year. Covid restrictions have forced us all to find new and innovative ways to manage with our work and our everyday lives. Just think about how much you're contributing to children's future when you support their imagination, resourcefulness, and originality.

Creativity was at the cornerstone of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Fred helped children see that creative thinking is important in all walks of life – whether you're a plumber or an artist. He embedded imagination and creative problem-solving in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe stories, having situations play out over the course of a whole week until they were resolved. Fred would often ask children what they thought might happen next to help solve the problems.

Fred made a special point to introduce children to creative artists and musicians, potters and poets. Watch what he said and did to support and inspire creativity on his visit with the rhythmic performers of STOMP.



You play such an important role in boosting children’s creative thinking, creative play and creative problem-solving. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Role Models

Creativity is contagious! Fred often told the story of the sculptor who visited the child care center every Friday and sat at a table just “playing” with the clay, not making anything specific. The teachers found that the children that year did the most imaginative things from clay because they were around him – and because they could tell that he enjoyed sharing his love of the clay with them. Fred liked to end that story with one of his favorite quotes, “Attitudes are caught, not taught.”

It’s such a gift for children when you invite parents and/or grandparents or other community members to share some creative activity they enjoy doing. And you can assure them they don’t have to be experts to inspire young children!

Resources

There are tons of commercial playthings available, but you offer so much more when you give children everyday “stuff” to play with, to manipulate, to build with. What might they make from paper towel tubes, paper bags, cardboard boxes?

Soon enough, in their formal schooling, they’ll be faced with “There’s only one right answer.” If, early on, you give them experiences with multiple ideas and different ways to use things, you’ll be laying the foundation for creative thinking and problem-solving for times in their life when they’ll need to think “out of the box.”

Responses

You could tell how much Fred appreciated the creativity of the STOMP performers and their instruments – from his words, his facial expression, his gestures and his interest in them. You, too, have many ways to applaud children for their ideas – for what they say...for how they work at creating. Your response means so much -- with your words, with a high-five or an appreciative look on your face. Even if the children’s ideas seem outlandish, you can help them feel good that they are coming up with unique ideas.

Fred’s chief consultant Dr. Margaret McFarland used to say that she saw her work with him as “the counterpart for the creative person,” and she delighted in seeing how he used her conversations to create the ideas, songs and stories for the Neighborhood.

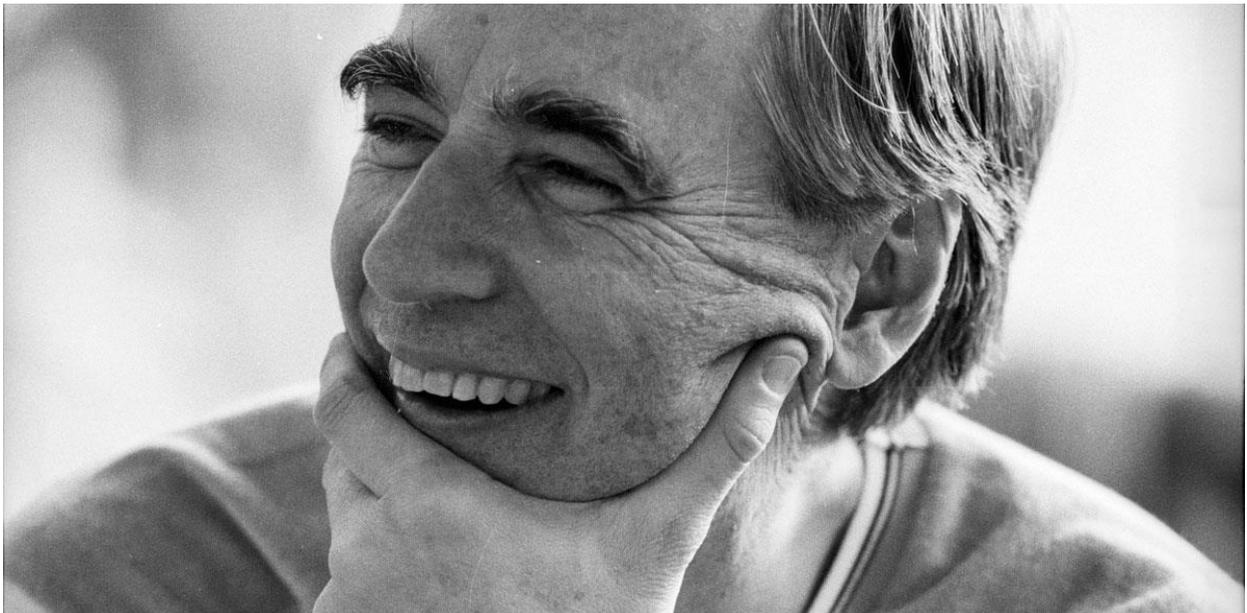
In much the same way, you, too, are the counterpart for the creativity in the lives of the children in your care, as you find your own ways to spark their ideas, their problem-solving, their play and their learning. Thank you from all of us. We know how important creativity is for their achievement and success in life...and just think about how important that is for our society.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"Being creative is part of being human. Everyone is creative. Each person's creativity finds different form, that's true; but without creativity of some kind, I doubt that we'd get through many of the problems that life poses."

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