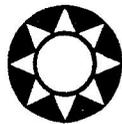


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CHAPTER 7

INTEGRATION

“I can’t remember how to make the tape player work! What did Sara say to do?”

“I’ve lost my jacket! Has anyone seen my jacket?”

“Where’d I put my glasses? Somebody’s taken ‘em. I had ‘em just a minute ago.”

When you hear children talking like this, their voices rising steadily in pitch, you know they are frustrated and anxious. Things are not going right for them. As a Creative Behavior teacher, you would also recognize that the source of the problem is not memory, a jacket, or a pair of glasses. You would recognize that these children are off-balance—they have become unintegrated. They have taken in too much information, done too much, and not had the time to absorb their experiences. You would understand that finding the glasses will not solve the problem. These children need an internal kind of help before they will be able to move on.

Emphasis on the essential importance of this process of integration is one of the factors that distinguishes Creative Behavior from other programs aimed at increasing self-esteem. According to the Sagans, unless experiences have been thoroughly absorbed, the individual goes on feeling more and more scattered—and therefore less able to function and less able to feel good. While integration also occurs naturally, they believe it is too important a part of learning and the development of a positive self-concept to leave to chance.

WHAT IS INTEGRATION?

The ability to integrate information and experiences is what separates humans from machines. The knowledge we take in does not come in bits and bites. We are constantly reviewing and fitting together new and old information, categorizing, comparing, and moving on. In Creative Behavior teaching you externalize this process to help children assimilate the important emotional and intellectual aspects of an experience so that they become part of their knowledge and self-concept.

In order to really integrate an experience or some new knowledge, the person must acknowledge what has occurred. Experience has shown that this kind of credit taking is most effective when it takes place with the support of a significant other. When you reflect on an important event and how you felt about what happened, you are integrating. If you describe this experience to a friend, you further integrate your experience. If that friend is someone you trust and respect you are more likely to believe any feedback you receive. The validation that comes from a friend helping you to acknowledge your experience is important to integration. Knowledge seems to sink in better and is more solid when it is shared.

Integration does not involve the introduction of new knowledge. Integration is the assimilation of experiences that have already occurred so that they can be used to further learning and growth. For example, I wanted to help Lynne integrate her birthday. Consequently I did not distract her by talking about Tony's new toy airplane and where he was going to fly it this weekend. Instead I talked to her about what she had done on other birthdays, what she was looking forward to about this one, what presents she wanted and what she expected to receive, and/or what she thought she would like and not like about being 10 years old. To help Lynne take credit and integrate, I kept the focus on her birthday without bringing in any new material.

As a teacher you can help children integrate in informal ways, as I did with Lynne. You can also encourage and develop their integration skills through planned exercises and activities. While these exercises may seem very simple and obvious, this apparent simplicity is deceiving. When children or adults sincerely respond to an integration assignment, what they really understand about the experience being examined becomes apparent to *them*. This highly personal internal understanding frees them so that they are no longer reliant on someone else's interpretation of the experience.

When you take a test, the assumption is that there are correct answers to the questions. With integration, there are no right answers. People have to dig out the information and the answers for themselves. By doing this, they take responsibility for what they have learned, what they have done, and how they feel about it.

THE PURPOSE AND BENEFITS OF INTEGRATION

The purpose of integration is to incorporate emotions, attitudes, responses, experiences, concepts, and skills into yourself so your whole self is enhanced or made stronger. When you incorporate what you have learned or how you feel about it into yourself, the new knowledge becomes a source of energy for you. It is available and can be used in the future. If you integrate an experience, you don't have to keep repeating it over and over again to relearn the lesson.

For example, Ibrahim is a good handball player. When he plays against Arturo he always wins, but Arturo doesn't like to lose and often will not leave the court when he is out. If Ibrahim has integrated this fact, he knows that when he plays with Arturo he may have trouble continuing his game. It then becomes his choice to play with Arturo or not.

In addition to helping children retain information, integration encourages analytical thinking. By asking children to explain why they liked or didn't like something, they are challenged to come up with reasons. At first students may say what they think you, as a teacher, want to hear; however, with practice and positive reinforcement their reasons will eventually become their own.

Transfer of knowledge from one area to another is a further benefit of integration. If Ibrahim has integrated the fact that Arturo has a difficult time losing at handball, he may be able to transfer this awareness to his relationship with Millicent. If she has a temper tantrum because she has lost a game, Ibrahim can come to the correct conclusion that both Arturo and Millicent have trouble with losing. Because he understands that he has a choice about playing with Arturo, he also can figure out how to take care of himself with Millicent by deciding whether he wants to play with her or not.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THERE IS NO INTEGRATION

As I have said, the process of integration can be compared to digestion. When food goes undigested it is not transformed into energy. The body cannot use what it has taken in, and this undigested food may actually detract from the proper functioning of the organism until it is passed off as waste material. Experiences that are collected but not integrated—not made part of the self-system or the whole—may also detract from the proper functioning of the person until they are forgotten or put aside.

For example, when I attend a workshop, I get many good ideas. Naturally I want to share them with my students. However, if I put out a new art project every day, introducing completely different materials, with no connection between the lessons, it does not matter how great these ideas were. The children acquire interesting, separate experiences, but that is the extent of their growth. They will

not be able to use the ideas later on because they will not have integrated what they have learned. They are moved so quickly from one experience to another that they have no time to attach their new information to old knowledge, thus making it a part of themselves. They have no opportunity to explore and discover on their own.

You might be surprised at how much the quality of your teaching will improve if you help children integrate. When children are not integrated they become ruder, noisier, more anxious, more disruptive, and/or more prone to heckle or fight. Some unintegrated children will resist any directions you give them. Others become overloaded; their eyes look unfocused and they do not respond when spoken to. In short, unintegrated children are more difficult to work with than integrated ones.

For example, if Ibrahim has not integrated that Arturo has trouble losing, he does not have the information necessary for making a decision about whether to play handball with Arturo or do something else. An unintegrated Ibrahim might continue to play handball with Arturo and spend a lot of time and energy trying to get him off the court. He would not remember why Arturo won't leave when his turn is over.

Katrina is the type of child who, when she decides what she wants to do, she wants to do it now. She is not able to wait. If she wants to cut out paper dolls and all the scissors are being used, she nags, heckles, or makes such a nuisance of herself that you may be ready to go out and buy a pair of scissors just for her. Instead you should recognize that Katrina needs to be integrated. She needs to talk, write, or draw about why it is so important for her to cut paper dolls now. She also needs to talk, write, or draw about what is happening in her life that might be important or scary for her. Katrina's frantic insistence on cutting out paper dolls may be a cover-up for something else. By helping her integrate the many different things that are occurring, you can decrease her anxiety and increase her willingness to adapt or accommodate herself to the normal give-and-take needed in a center.

This is not to say that integration will solve all the problems of anxious, fearful, or resistant children. Some of the problems may have other sources, but many problems that arise in the center can be solved through integration.

HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY INTEGRATION

Unfortunately just the fact that you, as a teacher, decide to focus on integration does not ensure a positive self-concept for your students. Children can integrate in either a healthy way or an unhealthy way.

For example, after competing in the local Bike Roadeo, Stacy told her friend Dara: "I'm happy that I got second prize for knowing how to fix my bike, but I wish I'd gotten first prize in the safety division. All I got was a ribbon for participating. Maybe next year I'll do better." Stacy and Dara then discussed different bike stories. A few days later Stacy told me she had decided she will continue working towards a first-place ribbon in safety. In this instance Stacy integrated her experience

in a healthy way. She was clear about what she liked and didn't like about the experience and understood her reasons for feeling that way.

In fact, Stacy went on to experience another benefit of integration: she was able to transfer what she learned from the Roadeo to another situation and teach someone else about it. When she heard that her friend Lamoya was learning how to ride a bike, Stacy offered to help her. She not only showed Lamoya how to balance herself so she would not fall off, she went over the basic safety rules with her. By helping Lamoya learn about bicycles, Stacy solidified her own knowledge in a way that will help her achieve her goal of winning first prize in safety next year. When Lamoya learned how to ride her bicycle, she and Stacy rode to the store to get ice cream cones to help them celebrate their accomplishments.

Stacy could have integrated this same experience in an unhealthy way. She could have said to Dara, "I've been to the Bike Roadeo and I did such a *fantastic* job. I got second place. I should have gotten first place in safety, but the judges wanted to give it to a boy. Anyway, I know so much about riding a bike that I can ride down the street with my eyes closed!" In this scenario Stacy sounds like she feels good about her experience but underneath her omnipotent boasting she would probably be putting herself down for not getting a first-place ribbon. Bravado is often a cover-up for poor self-esteem.

This kind of distorted response can have further consequences as well. By not honestly recognizing that she needs to improve her knowledge of safety, Stacy may be setting herself up for an accident. She is overlooking the fact that her second-place ribbon was in bike repair and that no prize allows someone to neglect normal safety precautions. In this frame of mind Stacy is not only failing to acknowledge facts and her true feelings, she also shuts out opportunities. Stacy needs to be first so badly that if Dara asked her to show her how to change a tire, Stacy might not want to do it. She might be thinking ahead to the next Roadeo and wondering if Dara would compete with her and win.

To help prevent unhealthy integration, mutual trust and respect need to be established between you and the child. Then you can give authentic feedback in a caring way that helps each child keep in touch with reality. If trust and respect have not been established, your feedback may not be believed, which can lead to further unhealthy integration.

ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE INTEGRATION

THE TEACHER'S ROLE

Developing integration assignments is exciting because the results are so individual and valuable. I try to use a variety of activities to integrate children

because each child has a unique style of learning and what works with one may not work with another. My assignments usually ask them to focus on what they liked and didn't like about a specific event or assignment and their reasons for feeling that way. We also examine similarities and differences, alternatives that were available to them, and whether these alternatives would create a better or worse situation for them.

There are several skills that you can use to facilitate integration. All of them depend on the willingness of the child to participate. If children are forced to share something they have made or feel they have to ask for feedback, the experience becomes inauthentic, and the integration that does take place is often unhealthy or negative. When you introduce these concepts, you should be sure the children know that they do have alternatives, such as saying no to an assignment, choosing what would be more appropriate for them, and then writing or drawing about that.

AUTHENTICITY

Teachers sometimes develop a habit of giving praise as feedback without really meaning it. There may be times when you want to say to children "That was the most wonderful thing I've ever seen" to make them feel good about themselves. However, being inauthentic is not helpful to students. Recent research into praise, reviewed by Randy Hitz and Amy Driscoll,¹⁰ shows that manipulative praise often has negative effects and does not foster a positive self-concept. Inauthenticity can be very damaging, both to the teller and to the hearer. It is not the way to build an atmosphere of trust and respect. It is important to model giving authentic feedback so that the children will learn this skill.

ACTION—WRITING, DRAWING, DRAMA, DISCUSSION

You can help children to integrate their experiences through a wide variety of music, dance, art, drama, and writing activities as well as through discussions. This process works with individuals or groups of all sizes. Verbal communication skills are needed, but otherwise children of any age can participate. The more actively and authentically involved the children are, the more effective the integration will be.

I prefer art, drama, and writing integration activities, because I am most skilled in these areas. The advantage of having students write their responses rather than talk about them is that every child has a chance to participate and do some

¹⁰ Randy Hitz & Amy Driscoll. "Praise or Encouragement? New Insights Into Praise. Implications for Early Childhood Teachers." *Young Children*. (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, July 1988): Vol. 43.



To facilitate integration it's important to share thoughts and feelings with a friend.

integrating. The children may not write their responses to all of the questions, but they will have thought about them. I have found that when I lead a discussion, unless I am very careful, one or two children do all the talking while the rest of the children just listen or daydream. If children don't participate, then they don't integrate their experience.

SHARING

Sharing a thought with friends or showing them an art product is important because it solidifies the children's learning experience. It plays a vital role in improving self-esteem because sharing provides an opportunity for children to receive authentic, positive feedback and experience the satisfaction or pleasure that enables them to risk the next step in learning. The action of saying aloud what they think or feel and having it heard and respected by someone important to them enables children to believe what they have said. The validation from this communication also helps quiet the internal critic's voice that asserts 'My work is no good' or 'I'm no good because I'm not doing good enough work.'

When children are sharing their creative work, be it drawing, writing, or drama, it is important to give enough time to the sharing process so that they come to value the credit taking and feedback. I also set up ground rules for sharing so that the child who is presenting work is not laughed at in a mean way, and everyone is clear that there will be immediate consequences for anyone who does that or makes a deprecating comment.

In the beginning of the year children will be shy and less willing to share, so this activity may take only a few minutes; nevertheless I keep offering them the opportunity. I often have children start by sharing their work with a partner. This is less scary than sharing in front of the whole group. If they are not ready to share, I don't push them.

GETTING FEEDBACK

I give tips to the group on how to ask for feedback. I tell the children they can ask for one piece of feedback from the group. Children who want to give feedback raise their hand as a signal that they have something to say. Children getting feedback look around them so they are aware of all the children who have their hands up. This way they know their range of choices. Then they think about who they want the feedback from. Do they want it from a special friend or from someone else? This process can have surprising results and benefits. For example, at the beginning of the year Shanta had a difficult time making friends. She was bossy and not willing to listen to other children when they were playing; however, she gave excellent, authentic feedback in a group situation. I helped her take credit for this, and gradually the children began to recognize her talent and ask her for feedback. After integrating her skill, Shanta was able to apply this style to other interactions, and it helped her improve her relationships.

Fear of Feedback

Many students are threatened by the thought of sharing their work with someone else because they feel vulnerable. They don't want to read their writing or show their art work, because they are afraid of getting unmasked-for, negative responses, such as being laughed at or being thought of as dumb by their peers or the teacher. I often see this fear at the beginning of the year, when a child does not yet feel safe in my group. Sometimes children are also afraid of hearing something more positive than they can believe. All these children need time to move at their own pace.

If children are not yet ready to share their thoughts, opinions, or work with a group, they need opportunities to say no, to have that statement heard and respected, and to be able to wait until they gain more confidence and strength before

they share. Being forced or talked into participating when they are not ready may increase their resistance or add to a sense of inadequacy. If children act like they want the group to see their picture but are not quite ready to show it themselves, I often ask if they would like me to hold the picture or read the story they have written. This seems to be a comfortable bridge for shy children.

Integrating Feedback

When I discuss feedback with the children, I always remind them that it is just another person's opinion. They have a choice about whether they believe the feedback or not. This is a further step in the integration process, essential if they are going to change their self-image. It too can happen in a healthy or unhealthy way.

GIVING FEEDBACK

In the beginning of the year I carefully explain why sharing and feedback are important to me. I tell children it is their job to give only positive, specific feedback about what they like and/or why they like it.

Feedback can be factual or emotional. For example children might say: "I like the bright red mountains" or "I like how you write stories because yours are really scary, and I like to be scared by stories" or "When you showed that picture, it helped me to remember when I was at the beach. I had a good time there and I like to remember it."

I do not allow students to give negative feedback or criticism because when they do, it usually is a put-down. Constructive criticism is reserved for me, as the teacher. It is extremely difficult to give suggestions for change and not hurt the feelings of the writer, artist, or performer. When children feel put down by criticism, they often give up. Many stop sharing completely. These children lose a chance to integrate, and the group loses the good ideas of that child.

I tell children that if they feel it is essential to share their negative feedback, they can tell me privately, either by talking to me or by writing me a note. By providing a vehicle for them to give negative feedback, I protect everyone. I make it clear that when negative feedback is given directly it is a put-down and results in consequences just like any other put-down.

The Importance of Timing

Sometimes students are not ready for feedback. It may be they feel they do not deserve it, or they have heard too much and they cannot handle any more information. I label this condition of not being able to absorb any more as overload.

Judging when a student is ready or not ready to receive feedback can be difficult. Often the student I particularly want to give feedback to cannot hear it, so

I have to be patient and wait. For example, Jomo was extremely shy and quiet. He had a lot of good ideas but not much confidence in what he said. One day I was thrilled when he asked to share in front of the group. I was even more thrilled when he asked Sean to stand beside him as his support. He had been on a trip with his family, he told us, and had brought back some souvenirs. His excitement overcame his fear of speaking out and, with Sean's help, he was able to communicate the highlights of his weekend. He did not ask for any feedback, but he heard the excitement in the children's voices as they asked questions. He saw the pleasure on their faces as they looked at his mementos. This experience did a lot to enhance his self esteem.

I wanted to give Jomo feedback about how pleased I was that he shared his weekend experience with the group and, that on top of that, he used Sean as support. But he had gotten enough from the class and from the process of sharing. My feedback could wait.

SUPPORT

One of the reasons Jomo was able to share was because he had support. Support can take many forms, from standing alongside a friend who is sharing with a group to going along with a friend who has to face a difficult confrontation. It can mean having a friend sit with you while you do your math homework to help you stick with an unpleasant task. Or it can involve listening and giving feedback while a friend complains and takes credit and then taking your turn to complain and take credit. Being good support can also mean just talking with someone about what is important to each of you or enjoying an activity or an event together. When you have the support of a good friend you increase the possibility of integrating your experience. The amount of experience that can be integrated also increases.

However, there are both appropriate and inappropriate ways of giving support. If Zach has asked Roberto to stand with him while he shows the group his new model car, and Roberto stands quietly giving his attention to what Zach is doing, he is providing appropriate support. He does not distract the audience. Roberto's support is inappropriate if he grimaces and wiggles, taking the focus away from Zach while he is talking.

To an uninformed observer, it might seem that the role of offering support is a weak, passive one. This is not so. It takes a great deal of strength to provide good support—to not take center stage away from the person you are supporting. Just because a person is in the support role one time does not mean that person is always in the support position. Friendship needs to be built on equality. Friends need to take turns sharing center stage and being supportive.

GIVING AND RECEIVING APPRECIATION

Children who know they are respected and valued tend to heckle less than children who feel unappreciated. If children can give authentic appreciation to others, they are more likely to be treated with respect rather than heckled themselves. By helping children integrate how much you, and others, appreciate them, you are not only reducing the amount of heckling that will go on in your center, you will increase the children's self-esteem.

I help children integrate how much others appreciate them by asking them to remember one way they were given thanks or appreciation. Sometimes children cannot remember receiving compliments. If this happens, I ask them to think of a time they feel they should have received kind words but didn't, and what would they have liked the person to have said or done. By reviewing past appreciation and thank you statements, children become clearer about when they have earned appreciation, even if they didn't receive it.

While standing up for yourself is frequently part of a primary teaching curriculum, often learning to give appreciation or thanks is left out. An appreciation can be as simple as saying "thank you" or "I like what you said. It made me feel warm and good inside." Children need to be taught to give genuine appreciation with care and consideration. Many children already have this skill, but many do not.

These are three techniques for helping children learn to give appreciation are: 1) ask them to write a letter of appreciation to their mom, a friend, or to you; 2) ask them to think about how they feel when they are given appreciation; or 3) ask them to write a letter of appreciation to themselves, one they would like to receive for something they did.

Many teachers like and use the idea of a "Student of the Week," having children write appreciation statements to or about a particular child. This honor is rotated so all children have an opportunity to receive appreciation statements from everyone, both adults and children. I do not use this idea, and it took me a while to understand that my discomfort came from the lack of authenticity in many of the letters that were written. I realized that if I or anyone else is forced to write an appreciation statement when I am upset with someone, my irritation will be there underneath the appreciation, and the statement will sound phony or contrived. The student probably will not swallow what I say and will feel that I cannot be trusted. Then, when I do make an authentic appreciation statement at another time, the student will be less likely to believe me since I have previously made an inauthentic one. This is something for you to decide in your own group.

I prefer to have children make authentic statements at the time they feel the appreciation. I teach this skill by example. When children have done something I appreciate, I thank them immediately on a one-to-one basis, being very specific about what I liked. Sometimes I ask the child if I may tell the children what he or she did so I can express my appreciation in front of the whole group. I respect the



Giving and taking credit can be simply acknowledging the appropriateness of wearing a special crown.

child's yes or no. I say an authentic thank you as often as I can. I never ask the children or force them to say thank you.

CREDIT TAKING

Credit taking is psychologically indispensable to the growth of self-esteem because it represents a healthy acknowledgment of who you are—what you can do, what you know, what you feel. It should not be confused with bragging or omnipotence or—at the opposite of end of the spectrum—putting yourself down.

The credit-taking process starts when a person makes a statement of fact such as “I hit a home run!” or “I want to take credit for getting *most* of the spelling words right in my test today!” By sharing this information with a friend, these children have positively acknowledged themselves. Healthy integration can only occur when there is credit taking.

When I observe children making a credit-taking statement but not believing its importance, I ask them how they feel about what they have done. If they are ready to take credit for an accomplishment, they will say they feel good about it.

For example, when Sandya told me she participated in the Jesse Owens race, I was proud of her. It did not matter to me if she had won a ribbon. From the tone of her voice I felt she was not taking credit for her accomplishment so I asked her how she felt about what she had done. She said she was disappointed she had not won a first-place ribbon. After expressing her disappointment she was able to say that she was pleased she had entered the race, and she knew that she had tried her best. I reinforced this feeling by telling Sandya that I was proud of her, she deserved a pat on the back, and I would give her one when she was ready.

Gestalt therapists believe learning is enhanced when it is experienced through body movement, such as bows, applause, jumping for joy, or pats on the back. After a child has shared an original drawing or writing with a group, you might applaud. The rest of the children will join in. Your applause teaches the group to give their appreciation in an appropriate way as well as gives credit to the presenter.

I understand how difficult it is to learn to take credit because even now I am sometimes unaware that I have done something to be proud of. At those times I need feedback from someone else to recognize my accomplishment. The respect of people I admire helps me to believe in myself and allow myself to feel proud. If I feel deserving or worthy my internal critic is not in control saying, 'Anne, you haven't done a perfect job, therefore, what you've done is no big deal.' Credit taking is also easier when I am rested and free from stress.

Other times I am clear about the credit I should take because I can feel my pride. Usually I feel credit as an infusion of solidity and warmth that spreads throughout my whole body, starting at my heart. The feeling may come and go, but each time it comes, my belief in myself sinks in a little deeper. When I know internally that I have done well, I have assimilated or integrated the information.

Following are some statements children have made about the process of credit taking:

Credit taking means telling other people about what I've done. It means sharing with them my pleasure in my actions and myself.

Credit taking is the way I feel after I've shared something. I usually feel very shy and very, very pleased with myself.

I like taking credit because then I can learn if other people think I've done a good job. Often times I'm not sure until someone else has told me, "Good job!" and I believe them.

Sometimes children brag or boast excessively about their accomplishments. This is not real credit taking. These children have a low self-esteem. They want to feel good about themselves but don't believe they are worthy. They are not clear about what they really do well or what their positive characteristics are. Nor are

they clear about how their actions and behaviors contribute to their success or failure at getting what they want. These children need feedback so they can learn to label their strengths, actions, and behaviors.

CELEBRATIONS

After a particularly big growth step or an unusual event, we have a celebration. This helps children feel proud of themselves, helps them integrate what they have learned, and allows me to share my pride and pleasure in their accomplishments with them.

I begin by asking the children to write a brief description of what we are celebrating, (for example, their hard work on improving yard or group-time behavior), including what has been important to them and why. Then I ask them to read their writing to a partner. If any of them are willing, I give them an opportunity to read a part or all of their writing to the whole group. To complete the celebration, this sharing is followed by either a special activity, an edible treat, or both.

The following are responses to the assignment "What did you like, not like, and why about working on improving the group's outside behavior?"

I liked working on the yard behavior, because it meant I wasn't bothered as much by Bill. I didn't like working on the yard behavior, because it meant I couldn't tease Bill like I like to.

I didn't like working on the yard behavior, because Meredith was always reminding me to take care of myself. I liked working on the yard behavior, because I knew we were doing a good job and we'd have a celebration on Friday.

I didn't like working on yard behavior, because I knew we'd have to write about it, and I don't like to write. I liked working on yard behavior because I feel a lot safer out there now.

FOCUSING

At the beginning of an integration assignment I usually ask the children to close or hide their eyes while I ask them a series of questions aimed at helping them remember the experience I want them to integrate. This process is different from visual imagery where you imagine specific things, such as a beach with waves breaking on it or a quiet, woodland meadow. I deliberately do not give the children a specific image to think about because I want them to consider what is important to them about the experience they are focusing on. By allowing them to explore

their own recollections, they are free to remember all different aspects of the experiences, including feelings, sounds, smells, tastes, movement, or textures. They are not limited to a visual image.

JOURNAL WRITING AS AN INTEGRATION TECHNIQUE

I use journal writing in addition to other writing integration assignments because I learn so much about each child by reading what he or she has written. Research has shown that journals help to establish a person's sense of worth and self-awareness. People can discover within themselves resources that they did not know they possessed. Writing in a journal can also focus your attention on a problem and give you new insights into its solution.¹¹

When I introduce the journals at the beginning of the year I explain to the children that I will be asking them to write about how they feel, what they are thinking about, what they like and don't like, and why. I expect them to be honest with themselves and me. I say that their authenticity is very important to me. If they are honest in their writing then they will be able to learn and grow from it, which is a marvelous thing.

I explain that journals are private property. If they want to read part or all of their writing to the group, I will give them an opportunity to do so, otherwise no one else is to read their journal but me. I read journals to myself and make comments on what is written. I will not share what is written in a journal without first asking permission. I tell the children to write "Don't Read" at the top of their writing if they write something and do not want me to read it. When I see "Don't Read," I respect that request.

Journal Feedback

Journals provide an important opportunity for me to develop trust and honesty between the children and myself. I give a tremendous amount to the children by taking the time to write authentic, positive responses to their journal entries. This is very time-consuming for me, but I consider it well worthwhile. My responses often include something like "I appreciate how you felt and how hard you tried. Good for you!" I limit myself to giving positive replies, saying what I liked about their writing and why I liked it. I do not correct grammar or spelling. Nothing turns off creativity faster than red pencil markings all over a page. Because children are writing from their own personal experience, there are no wrong answers. Nevertheless the journals do present a learning opportunity for the children and by

¹¹ Johnna Laird, "For the Record: Thoughts on Paper." *San Jose Mercury News*. 28 February, 1990. The Weekly, p. 2.

being genuine in my responses to them, I can nurture my students so they are able to grow and change.

Example of a Journal Assignment

The following are some responses to a journal assignment to explain what is scary and not scary about entering another grade.

I hate the first day of school, because it is so scary. I don't know if I will have any friends.

I have questions. Who will be in my class from this year? Will they still like me? What about the teachers? Stephanie said the teachers are nice, but are they really?

I hate the first day of school, because I'm so shy. I don't say much, and maybe the teacher will think I'm dumb.

I like the first day of school, because it means I'm one year closer to getting to middle school.

CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO INTEGRATION ACTIVITIES

There are several factors I take into consideration when I plan an integration lesson. I think about my own and the children's pacing—which may be the same or different—what we are ready for, and what we are not. I consider alternatives—what choices I will give to them, and what I will do if they resist. I also imagine different forms that their resistance might take. In other words, I try to anticipate how the assignment can be shaped to achieve my goals, which are to increase children's self-esteem and help them recognize and acknowledge how they are feeling.

PACING

Pacing is the rate at which you are willing and able to integrate. Some people change willingly and are able to keep integrated throughout the process so their resistance is generally low. Some people are resistant to change and so need to move more slowly in acquiring new experiences or new information. It is important to pay attention to these differences because when a person is forced out of a pace that is comfortable, he or she can become anxious and resistant.

Pacing is also the rate at which it is comfortable and appropriate for you, as an individual, to learn new information. Everyone has his or her own individual pace. The advantage of knowing your students' pacing is that you will not try to push them too fast so that they experience failure or go so slowly that they get bored.

Often Creative Behavior teachers give the following instructions at the beginning of an assignment, "Get in a comfortable position. Close or hide your eyes. Pay attention to your breathing. Do not change it in any way, just be aware of its rate and depth. Use your breathing to get in touch with your pacing."

By listening to your rate of breathing, you can learn if your body is especially speedy or sluggish. If you are hurrying to reach your goal, you frequently ignore your anxiety. If you slow down, pay attention to your breathing, and become aware of your anxiety, you may find it is appropriate or inappropriate. This knowledge can govern your pacing. Breathing helps you look at your anxiety. It also may help you feel more secure because you are more aware of what is going on.

COMPLAINING

One mother told me her son was complaining too much and she did not like it. She said to me that if only I did not allow or encourage complaints, she would be much happier. I pointed out that she felt better because she had just complained to me. She had stated her opinion clearly so that I knew what it was. She had gotten her concern out in the open. This was one purpose of complaining. The complaint was not inside her, bothering her, or stopping her from doing something else.

Complaining is sometimes a necessary step toward integration. It can be a form of resistance—often it is resistance to the very credit taking that is so crucial to integration. For many children complaints are closer to the surface and easier to express than credit or their deeper feelings such as fear, anger, pleasure, or joy. They can hide their credit and feelings by not recognizing them, but once their complaints are expressed, the way is paved for acknowledgment and for real credit taking. Through this process of complaining and credit taking children are often able to get in touch with their feelings. Children need plenty of time for complaining. Listening to a complaint does not mean having to fix it or solve the problem.

RESISTANCE

Resistance is part of the learning process. All children, at some point or other, will be resistant to something you have planned. I try to listen carefully to distinguish the difference between when children say "I don't want to do this" but mean "I'm not ready to do this activity." If I feel they are not ready, I need to give them a direction or ask a question that will give them a focus in an area where they feel competent, such as "What happened yesterday that was important to you?" or

“What do you like and not like about doing this activity?” However, if I give too many options for an integration assignment, some children get stuck trying to decide which one to choose. If they never get started, they cannot experience the satisfaction of working on or finishing an assignment.

Resistance may come from several sources: not wanting to change, having a different pace, needing to go more slowly in order to absorb information, fear of failure, or fear of success. Some children choose to resist doing an assignment in order to feel in control and have some self-respect. Journal assignments are an excellent vehicle for helping children recognize and develop strategies for acknowledging their resistance without putting themselves down and for moving through their resistance to the next step.

“Anne, I don’t know what to write!” they might say.

I say, “Write that! Write that you don’t know what to say. Write about how that makes you feel.”

I am clear about my own resistance to begin work on a new assignment or make a change in my routine. I often have a need to say, “No, I’m not going to do this” before I can say, “Yes I will.” Therefore I am willing to listen to my students say no as a first step of doing an integration assignment. That statement of no is similar to a complaint before starting what may be seen as a difficult but doable task.

If children continue to complain, I often smile and move to another area in the room. By smiling, I communicate that I have heard their resistance. By moving on without responding, I avoid a head-on confrontation. The children have been able to express their resistance without encountering a negative or limiting response.

After acknowledging and working through the resistance, the next step is beginning the assignment. If they really are unable to do the assignment, they know what my three standard alternatives are: 1) draw a picture of themselves unwilling to do the assignment; 2) write about why they are unwilling; or 3) write about what they feel would be more important for them to be doing and why.

Healthy resistance occurs when children feel unable to cope with a situation. Sometimes a previous interaction, either at home or school, has been so disruptive that children can not focus on an activity. Sometimes they have already taken in all the information they can handle for one day. When children have some choice and control over the focus of their work, they become more willing to get involved in the process of doing an assignment, and they take more pride in their product. They are also less likely to find reasons for putting off starting or completing the assignment.

THE PAYOFF

When children are integrated, you can practically watch them grow. You see them make connections between past and present learning and experiences that

ignite their interest in new learning and give them confidence that they can make sense of their world. They understand who they are because they know how they feel and why; they have an essential tool that helps them solve problems, learn skills, and build relationships. This self-knowledge is fundamental to a high self-esteem. I love doing integration activities because when students share their thinking with me, I can witness their progress and know that I have contributed to their long-term happiness and growth.

PLANNING AN INTEGRATION LESSON

I plan integration exercises for activities ranging from special movies, stories, holidays, and important events to guest presentations. If something unusual or scary happens like an earthquake, flood, fire, or an attempted child molestation, it is crucial to help the children express their feelings and describe what is important to them about what has happened. If a child is getting glasses, braces, or has been given a disastrous hair cut, it is time to try and put things in perspective by looking at the pros and cons, as well as by voicing complaints and fears. When any situation stimulates excessive heckling or stress, integration is important so that children can return to normal, and you, as a teacher, don't have to deal with unnecessarily disruptive behavior.

I do not try to integrate every single event or experience the children have. That would be too time-consuming. The children get a daily integration through their journal writing. When something out of the ordinary occurs, I give them an additional assignment. I pick and choose events to integrate, giving no more than one or two special integration assignments during a week.

During an integration assignment, I ask children to think of three statements concerning the event being integrated. I have chosen the number three because I want more than one thought from them, but I also don't want them to feel overwhelmed and unable to finish the assignment. I know the number three will require some reflection on their part. Often their second or third statement is more insightful or meaningful because it takes a while for children to get in touch with thoughts and feelings that are really important to them.

I am very careful to ask children to think about their dislikes. I feel negative comments can be shared as long as another person's feelings will not be hurt by the information or the style of presentation. Thinking about and giving both sides of a question or incident helps children use critical thinking skills. Older children or children with more highly developed skills can respond in depth and more detail to these assignments.

Following are examples of nine basic Creative Behavior integration lessons. I use or adapt one of these lessons each time I give an integration assignment. Some

are general integration lessons and can be used almost any time, while others can be used only in specific situations. If the instructions say "Discuss, draw, or write," I decide which one of those actions I am going to present to the children. I do not give them that decision to make.

1. **Discuss, draw, or write about three things you liked and three things you didn't like (regarding a specific event or activity). Explain why you felt the way you did.** It is one thing to say "I like playing ball," but when I'm asked to explain *why* I like to play ball, I have to stop and think. Do I like it because I like to win? Do I like the feeling in my arm after I've thrown a ball really far? Do I take pleasure in being outside with my friends? Do I like being a member of a group? Or is it a combination of these reasons? I don't like playing ball, because I'm afraid someone might make fun of me when I throw. I'm afraid I won't be able to catch the ball, so it will hit me. Maybe I'll decide that I really don't like to play ball all that much. A more honest statement for me might be: "I like to be with my friends. I would rather play tag, but if they really want to play ball, I'll play with them." The kind of self-knowledge that this exercise elicits is basic to making well-thought-out decisions. This is my work-horse integration lesson, the one I use most of the time.
2. **What is similar in this experience to what you have seen or done before? What is different?** Some children think in terms of absolutes, e.g., "I'm *always* doing the same old thing. I never do anything new." If these children look for and find similarities and differences, it expands their horizons by helping them be more realistic in their perceptions.
3. **Think about what you did (in a specific activity this morning, this week, etc.). What was important to you? Why was it important? If nothing was important to you, what would you rather have been doing and why?** Young children often want to please adults by doing things right. They need to know what is expected of them and the consequences of not meeting those expectations. But children also need practice in deciding what is important to them and what they expect of themselves. This exercise allows children to begin to think about what they want and value, rather than what someone else wants and expects of them. This is crucial to decision making throughout their lives. They may decide that nothing was important to them. If that is the case, then it's an acceptable response.

4. **Discuss, draw, or write about one to three facts you knew about before we did an activity. What did you learn that was new? What do you want to learn more about?** By identifying what they already knew and what they have now learned, children are taking credit and responsibility for their own growth. By identifying what they want to learn more about, children are able to get focused for the next step in learning.
5. **(Before the activity): What three things do you expect to see (or do, or hear)? What three things do you not expect to see (or do, or hear)? (After the activity): What did you see or do that was the same as you expected? What was different?** This assignment helps children distinguish between fantasy and reality as they compare their expectations with what happened. If their expectations were close to reality, they can take credit for their accuracy. If their expectations were off, they can take credit for their disappointment and unsuccessful guess. I don't stress or reward accurate predictions. Thinking about and making a prediction is the important aspect of this lesson.
Note: I often give this assignment before going on a field trip. If we are going to a fire house, for example, the children have great fun saying they don't expect to see dinosaurs or trained seals. Again it is important to give the children an opportunity to say what they think will and will not happen, to begin to define the parameters of an experience.
6. **What did you find out about yourself and your partner from working together? (If you have trouble starting this assignment, look for similarities and differences in the way you worked.)** This assignment helps children take credit for how they work in small or large groups. They can discover there is more than one way to solve the same problem. This assignment also helps children to incorporate feedback about their own and another's way of working. They develop their observational skills and learn to recognize similarities and differences. The emphasis on differences and similarities of work styles leads to appreciation of one another rather than denigration and helps them value differences.
7. **What was comfortable and uncomfortable for you (in a specific situation)?** Identifying what is comfortable and uncomfortable helps students decide how they physically feel in their bodies. When they honor their feelings they become able to make better decisions about how to take care of themselves. In

addition they begin to realize that they do not have to rely on someone else's opinion in making a decision. This lesson is very similar to Integration #1, which develops the children's critical thinking skills.

8. **Roleplay an interaction. Then draw, discuss, or write about how you felt as you were performing or what you learned.** Children can roleplay many different situations: getting someone to stop a particular behavior, such as heckling; arguments over different topics, such as how to use equipment or take turns. When children put themselves in the shoes of another child, they usually understand that child's position better and understand why a person acts the way he or she does. This lesson builds understanding and compassion for others and often, after the experience of roleplaying, children relate to others in a more positive way.
9. **Discuss or write about what you gained and lost in a specific situation.** This is a difficult assignment. I don't usually give it until the end of the year. In order to gain clarity, we have to do a lot of talking as a group about specific situations, such as fighting in the yard. What do they gain and lose from fighting? We discuss the following questions: Why do people fight? What do they get out of the fighting? What do they lose by fighting? Why weren't they able to try another alternative? What might have been an alternative to try? This assignment helps children evaluate the choices they have made and the consequences of those choices.

A DIALOGUE AS AN INTEGRATION TECHNIQUE

One of my favorite integration techniques is to give the children a focus and have them imagine two of their many internal characters. For example, after a school health unit about the respiratory system that included the effects of smoking on their lungs, I asked the children to think about two of their internal characters, one who wants them to smoke and another who doesn't want them to smoke. They were to write a dialogue between these two characters. The length of the dialogue and the outcome was up to each student.

When children write a dialogue, there are many opportunities for integration. They incorporate their own feelings and beliefs into the skit, which helps them solidify and become clearer about what they believe as well as why they think or feel that way. In trying to persuade one character to behave in a particular way, children have to marshal their facts and review what they know so their argument

is believable. This solidifies their knowledge of a subject. They also begin to learn about how another person might feel. By writing on both sides of an issue, children begin to develop more empathy for others.

After they have written their dialogues, the children often want to produce their dialogues as plays. This takes awhile because I feel that everyone who wants to should have a chance to perform. These dialogues are hilarious, because the children pretend they are teenagers and act in a most affected, sophisticated way.

Following are some of the children's responses to the integration of this unit:

I liked playing the part of a smoker. It was fun dressing up as a teenager and pretending to smoke. When someone asks me to smoke a cigarette, I expect to say no. I didn't like that I was so nervous, I dropped the cigarette during the play.

I liked learning about the respiratory system, because I want my mom to stop smoking. When I told her about the cancerous lungs, she said she'd think about it. I didn't like that it was hard getting close to the sheep's lung, because there were so many kids around it. I wanted to be up close all the time.

I loved writing the play. I want to be a writer when I grow up so this gave me some practice. I think I had good ideas for the play too. I didn't like putting on the play because I get scared when I get up in front of a group of people.

TIMING AND CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE FOCUS

The timing of when to teach an integration lesson depends upon what you are integrating. I teach the integration lesson for the respiratory system about four or five days after the children have completed this unit. It is a planned integration lesson, because it is part of the whole unit on the respiratory system. However, when there is a fight between two or three children, I immediately give them an integration assignment. This can be part of our conversation as I am discussing the interaction, or it can be an assignment to describe in writing what happened and include what they liked, and didn't like about the interaction, the consequences of what they did, and what they might do another time so they won't get in trouble.

There is no hard or fast rule for choosing one focus over another for an integration assignment. Some lend themselves to specific situations better than others. If a focus seems appropriate and feels comfortable to you, then use it. For example I would not use writing about facts a child knew before doing an activity if I were integrating a puppet show, because the children may not have facts to write about. I would use either like and not like or what was similar and different from

previous puppet shows for this kind of an integration. Writing or drawing about facts they knew and learned would have been an appropriate assignment to integrate the respiratory unit, although I chose not to use it.

When you write an integration lesson you need to be careful not to fall into the trap of trying to make it the best integration there ever was. Remember that simple assignments can be highly effective. In fact, if you put in too many directions or choices, you will probably defeat your purpose. The children may be so overwhelmed, they might need to integrate the integration.

A Specific Example of Creative Behavior Integration

This example can be used in a variety of situations such as:

- after a story that is either read aloud to a group or that children read to themselves
- after completing an art project
- after going on a trip
- after a special event

All children can do the assignment, because they are working from their own personal experience. If a child was not present when the event took place, that child can use the same focus and write about what he or she was doing at the time of the event. Before giving this type of a lesson to children, it is important that you, as a teacher, have the experience of doing the lesson yourself. This increases your sensitivity to the children's responses and helps you give yourself and the children credit for the work you have all done.

Purpose of the lesson

1. To help children enjoy an experience.
2. To provide an opportunity to follow directions.
3. To help children take credit for their reading (listening) and drawing skills.
4. To provide an opportunity to share with a partner.
5. To provide an opportunity to integrate.

Materials

newsprint (12" x 18" if possible)
 crayons
 pencils
 Instructions

Ask children to:

1. Read or listen to a story, tape, etc.
2. Take a few minutes to think about what they read (heard, saw).
3. Draw a picture of something they heard or read that was important to them.

If children finish before the time period is over, have them add more detail to their drawing or write a description telling what was important to them and why.

4. Choose a partner and share their picture.
 - a. Explain to their partner what was important about what they drew and why. Listen to their partner's explanation.
 - b. Discuss what is the same and what is different between their picture and their partner's.
 - c. Decide on one statement of a similarity or a difference to share with the group. (Each child shares a statement.)
5. Share pictures and/or statements in the group. Ask for feedback if they want it.
6. If they are willing, tell one thing they liked about this activity and/or one thing they did not like and why they felt that way.

INTEGRATION HELPS YOU LEARN TOO

Before students can take in new information or develop new skills they need to be clear about what they have discovered in previous experiences. Therefore, a major purpose of integration is for teachers and students to evaluate what they have learned. A second purpose is to enjoy and celebrate accomplishments. As a teacher, I know what I provide for children and what I hope they learn, but, until I ask them I can only guess what they have actually assimilated. What a child considers important is not necessarily what I had in mind when I presented the lesson. However, a child's response may be critical to my planning for the next step in the curriculum. An integration activity gives me an opportunity to learn how individual children think.

When my students are responding to an integration lesson, I particularly want them to be honest with themselves about what is important to them, how they are feeling, and what they are thinking about so they can make reasoned decisions based on rational observations. It is not valuable for me or them if they try to say what they think I want to hear.

I learn a lot about the children from reading their writing. For example, Jody wrote he did not like the center, because he did not have any friends. I was surprised

because children sought him out and wanted to play with him. Finally he said that he wanted to play with Roger exclusively, but Roger didn't always want to play with him. Jody's logic went like this: If Roger doesn't want to play with me all of the time then he is not my friend, so I don't have any friends.

Once this problem was out in the open, I was able to deal with it by helping Jody see the fallacy in his thinking. Jody and Roger continued to play together occasionally although they never became best friends. Jody realized other children did like him, and eventually he was able to think of himself as a person who had friends.

How you frame a question can be crucial to the answers you receive. You need to think about the kind of response you want and are willing to hear. If you ask the children to respond to the question "How do you feel about the center?" you run the risk of hearing negative statements about your teaching. You may want to rephrase it to "What do you like about the center?" and so limit their answers to positive statements. This is up to you. One thing that has helped me listen to adverse comments is knowing that I don't have to believe everything that is said or follow all of the suggestions. I make sure, particularly when I read negative comments, that I have a supportive friend, either with me or available by phone, so I can talk about the comments, become clearer about how I feel about them, and decide how I want to handle them.

Below are some replies to the assignment: What did you like, not like, and why about the center? What did you learn this year? What do you want to learn more about? Note that I put the negative question at or near the beginning of the instruction. I have found that if students can identify and acknowledge their adverse feelings first, and have those feelings accepted by an adult without fear of being put-down or criticized, they respond more authentically. If children or adults feel that only positive statements are acceptable, they may integrate their negative feelings as bad or think they are bad because of their feelings.

Some examples of children's responses:

What I liked about the center is songs, journals, art, doing plays, working with partners, and having Anne as a teacher. I liked working with partners, because then you don't feel like you're alone when you're doing something and can usually ask somebody something. I also liked having music, because it's fun to sing. I liked having Anne as my teacher, because she was nice and understanding especially with mistakes. What I didn't like about the center were some journal assignments, doing my homework, some group times, the first day, and thinking about the tests I had to take at school. I don't like the first day, because you wonder who's going to be in your group, and it's scary. I don't like doing tests, because I get scared. I think I'm not going to get it right.

What I don't like about the center is sometimes you want to get along with someone, and you and the other person don't seem to get along well at all. Sometimes I feel like saying, "You better be my friend or else!" What I like about the center is eventually you and that person become very good friends, and that's what I like about the center.

The children's excitement as they learn to express themselves validates my belief in the importance of the integration process. I also have some of the same feelings of excitement and pleasure when I share the children's responses with my colleagues. Their positive feedback helps me to see my competence as a teacher and encourages me to continue the next steps in my own growth.

There are many events and forces in children's lives—from advertising to poor home situations—that can reinforce their feeling bad about themselves. Not every aspect of their lives will be set up to build their self-esteem. I believe, though, that the more positive experiences they can have at the center, the more they will be strengthened to put those forces in perspective and learn that they can feel good about themselves despite external circumstances that are beyond their control.