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Keeping the Creativity

When I was in preschool, my mom would give me ten minutes to go into my closet and pick out my clothes that I was going to wear for that day. I didn't care what the clothing looked like, most of the time I came up with pretty interesting outfits. I would grab a shirt I thought was pretty then put it on. Then I would grab pants that I liked even if they didn't match. I liked them both, so I wore them together. I was able to dress myself not caring what other people thought of me. Everyday I set foot to school wearing what ever I wanted; I was able to show my individuality with out caring about other people's judgments of me.

Now I'm a senior in high school. On an average it takes me about twenty to thirty minutes to get ready. When I wake up in the morning, I put on an outfit that I normally want to wear. Then I take it off and put something else on. I keep going back between shirts and pants and changing my mind. Then after about fifteen minutes, I end up going to the first outfit I originally had on. The reason I went back and forth is because I care about what certain people think, mostly myself thank goodness. It takes me a lot of time to get ready. Sometimes, I don't wear a shirt that I like because someone else won't like it.

Due to my feelings back then and now, I set out with Ross to explore the differences between preschoolers and high school students. We wanted to show that preschoolers have no peer pressure, no boundaries, and no limits to where their minds can take them. When we interviewed the preschool children they said that they do care what other people think. So, then we needed to find a new twist to investigate. We thought it would be interesting to find out if preschoolers would want to be in high school right now, and if high school students would rather be in preschool or high school now. We choose to interview three preschool students, and three high school students.

The first person we interviewed is Libby. She goes to school at LAPP, Los Altos Parent Preschool. Libby is five years old and loves to play on her bunk bed with her

favorite little bear. When Libby walks through the front gate of the preschool all the fun begins. She is the life of the party. She will likely do great things in life if she doesn't lose her creativeness. Libby is always ready to play and be a part of the fun. There is never a dull moment when she is around. There was never a moment to sit down and relax, she was always ready to do something new and learn something else. The fun never ended. Whether she was playing with friends, learning from the teacher, or playing on her own she could entertain herself for hours.

We wanted to know if she cared what other people thought of her. When we asked her this she said, "Yes... because when I look pretty I like it when people tell me I'm pretty." Her response seems true with everyone. It seems that everyone likes it when people tell them they look pretty. However she doesn't seem to care as much about what other people think of her if she is herself. She is not afraid to be who she is even though people may make judgments about her.

When we asked her what she wants to be when she grows up, she told us, "I want to be a teenage princess dragon. It's a teenager, that's a dragon, and that's a princess that is very fro fro." She told us that she was going to be 99 feet tall, all the colors in the world, and live in the clouds. Her imagination soared by. She doesn't want to be a business woman, or a doctor to make money. She wants to be a "teenage princess dragon," to help save people. Although her reality will hit when she is older that this is not possible, her imagination helps her life in a unique and beautiful way. If you saw her walking down the street with her mom, she would be kicking her feet up, singing a song, telling a story, or just having a ball doing anything. When we asked her what age she would want to be, she told us that it didn't matter because she wants to be a teenager.

We came back a few days later to interview her again, and we asked her one more time what she wanted to be to make sure it wasn't just that day that she wanted to be a "teenage princess dragon." She told us, "I want to be a teenage princess dragon.

It's a teenager, that's a dragon, and that's a princess that is very fro fro," the exact same thing she told us before. We were both surprised, we both thought she would say something different, but she didn't. It was as if she had what she wanted to be memorized in her head; it was the same thing every time.

When we asked her to sing us a song, and tell us a story she came up with creative ideas. She sang "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," with a twist. She made up her own ending, and sung it like no one was watching, or listening. When she told me a story it was about a little princess girl. It was very creative and we weren't sure the responses we were going to get from her. When we were interviewing her, her friends were next to me on the bench seat, and she was not scared to sing, or tell me a story in front of them. She even started to dance when she was singing the song. We believe her creativeness is going to help her get far in life if she doesn't shut it out when she gets bigger.

The second preschooler we interviewed was Jason. He also goes to LAPP, Los Altos Parent Preschooler. He is five years old and loves to spend time playing with his little brother, golfing with his dad, and playing on his computer. He is a very kind kid, and loves to have fun. He gets along with his little brother, Justin, and they love to play games. Sometimes, they both go to the preschool together. We noticed that Jason can get along with anyone. Although there are only about 10 kids at the preschool, they are all very close and good friends. They all play with each other, and get along. Jason loves to make music on his computer. He told me that he makes different songs.

When we asked him what he wanted to be when he grows up, he told me, "I want to be an archeologist." We then asked why, and he responded, "Because its cool and you get to dig for things, and find dinosaurs and, sea dinosaurs." He doesn't want to have a high paying job just because it pays well. He wants to do something he likes and

enjoys. The same reason Libby wants to be a “teenage princess dragon.” They both want to be something out of the ordinary because they enjoy those things.

Jason is very creative and uses his imagination when he knows it’s the right time. When we asked him to sing us a song he jumps right into the ABC’s. He then got embarrassed and stopped in the middle because he made a little mistake. As soon as I said it was ok and you did well, he started again and sung the song all the way through. At first he was nervous and scared but then in the end he got into it and was singing in a different voice and dancing around in circles. He then knew that I wasn’t going to make fun of him, and he was comfortable doing anything in front of me. We then followed up with, “Can you tell me a story?” He told a short and to the point story. He wasn’t sure if what kind of story that we wanted but he told one anyways. He was very open with me and wasn’t shy or scared of anything we said to him.

After we asked Libby how old she wanted to be, we asked Jason the same thing. He told us a different answer, but it was pretty close to what Libby said. His response was that, “I want to be ten, because then I am bigger and I can do a lot more things.” As far as he knows when you’re older, you can do more things and it will be more fun. But what he doesn’t know is that everything changes and he will soon wish that he was younger again.

The last preschooler we interviewed is one of our little siblings. We interviewed Carly’s Little brother, Jack, also known as Jack-Jack. He is going to be four soon and he goes to West Valley Child Development Center for preschool. Jack has three older sisters, and a baby sister. Jack is very willing to do anything. When we go to new places, he is shy at first but then warms up and is himself. He loves to play with his sisters, jump on the trampoline, and pretend he is a super hero. He has seen almost every super hero movie created. His favorite super hero is Spider Man.

When we asked him what he wants to be when he is big, he said he wants to be Spider Man. He wants to be able to spin webs. He wants to be spider-man because he can save peoples lives, and fly with the webs. He, like the other preschoolers we interviewed, doesn't want to have a high paying job. He doesn't think money equals success. He wants to be a super hero and be famous.

We asked him to sing us a song. He started right away to sing the itsy-bitsy spider song. He did every movement that goes along with the song. And sang it twice. He started to move his feet and his hips as he was singing, so that it would go with the movements. We also asked him to tell us a story and he told us a story about spider-man and the joker, and how they got in a fight one time.

Just like before when we asked Libby and Jason how old they wanted to be Jack told us that he wants to be seven years old. He told us that he wants to be seven because he can do more things then when he is four. He said that he would be able to skateboard, and jump higher on the trampoline too. Most little kids that you ask how old they want to be, tell you an older age then the one that they are because they think that when you're bigger you can do more things then when your little. Even though you have more responsibilities and more things to do, they still want to be older then they are.

He told us that when he is in high school that he is going to have a lot of friends and be able to do a lot more then right now. When we asked him if he would rather be in high school than in preschool, he said, "Yes, because I'll have a lot a lot of friends, and we will be able to play a ton more games." He doesn't know that in high school he is going to have quite a bit of homework, more responsibilities, and more worries to think about then now, in preschool.

After we interviewed our three preschool children, we realized that preschoolers have it easier than high school students. But isn't that how it should be? Should a five year old be responsible for learning how to use synthetic division? That would be

impossible. When you are in preschool you are supposed to have no worries, and no pressure to succeed. That comes when you're older. Each year you learn more and learn more responsibilities.

We wondered if these three preschoolers and other ones at their schools would be able to keep their creativity and imagination with them. Once you get to middle school, it seems that most kids start to change. They lose more of themselves, and start to care about what other people think of them. When you're in high school it's all about finding out who you are and learning about yourself. Don't you think we know the most about ourselves in preschool where no one tells us a certain way to look, to act, or to be? Once we leave preschool and go to elementary school, we start to care a little more about what other kids think of us. After we hit middle school, we care more and more about what other people think. Then once in high school we have to find ourselves again. It should be easier than this. Everyone should just care about themselves and not worry about what anyone else thinks.

Our next step is to interview our high school students, and see if they were able to keep their childhood, their imagination, or their creativity.

The first person in high school that we interviewed was Monica. Monica is the kind of person you look twice at when she walks past you. The combination of the weird yet not distasteful clothes, the content smile set upon her attractive face, accented with jewelry makes her stand out in a crowd. She's the kind of person you can see selling her artwork in the streets of a major city without thinking "hippie" or "weirdo." When you have a conversation with Monica, it is immediately apparent that you are talking to an extremely bright young woman. She has a deep level of thinking and often interprets things beyond their apparent meaning. Monica has a 4.0 high school GPA, and will be going to either UCLA or Chapman art school next year.

Monica likes to have friends over at her house after school, and enjoys making up art projects or hanging out with her parents and younger sister. She dreams to be an artist and always has. When she grows up, she wants to become a graphic designer, because she thinks that way she can get her ideas out, be creative and artistic and make money. When we asked Monica to sing a song, she asked us to sing a beat for her so she could make up a little rap about how she was feeling. When we asked her to draw a picture she drew a little sketch of Ross with little details that reflected on things that had happened to us recently, and our environment (Monica owns a tarantula, that creeps us out). Although Monica loved the bliss ignorance of being young in preschool, her life is great and she enjoys it more now.

The second person we interviewed was Christie. Christie is extremely outgoing, loves to laugh, loves to meet new faces, and gets along well almost everyone. Christie is extremely ambitious, and doesn't stop trying until she has achieved her goals. Christie enjoys spending time with her friends, driving her car, and making things out of clay. She has a 4.0 GPA and is going to either University of Michigan or UCLA med school next year.

Christie enjoys doodling, singing country songs, and lying on her bed studying Biology. She sang her favorite country song and drew me a picture of two elephants who were holding trunks. Her story was about something funny her friend had said the night before. When she was in preschool, Christie dreamed of being a gymnast, because she loved jumping around on the trampoline and dreamed of having people applauding her at the Olympics. Now she wants to go to med school to become a nurse. She would really like to be a part of "Medicines sans Frontiers," so she can go to third world countries and help people in need.

Our third interviewee was Will, who wouldn't look out of place at a Led Zeppelin concert. Hair down to his shoulders and a green bandana around his head reflect accurately on his personality: Will is into classic rock, and plays the guitar in his free time, keeping things mellow and just hanging out with friends. He also enjoys debates and letting other people hear his opinions. He is very focused and strives to accomplish his goals. Will has straight A's and is bored with normal high school.

When Will grows up he wants to go into the music business – preferably production, and he wants to have a happy family. The song he sang for me was “Alive” by Pearl Jam. He didn't draw a picture for me, but he did tell me a story about how he dislocated his shoulder last week. Will doesn't remember preschool too well, but he's happy enough now that he wouldn't go back.

All three of our high school interviewees do extremely well in school, seem to be apt to do well in life, and have a cool dream they are chasing, and are also all artists in different mediums. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Creativity*, to be creative is “the interaction between a person thoughts and a sociocultural context.” This must mean that young children are more creative, because their minds are still learning how to interact with the world. So, how did these students, who are in the minority, keep that creative aspect in them where many more around them did not? The logical answer would be that they continued to experiment with different ways to express themselves, or they rejected society's norms and replaced them with their own. Either way, these young adults are distinctive from the rest of the population because something was different while they were growing up. Was it the way they were raised, that something abnormal happened to them at a young age, or simply that they found that it was enjoyable to be artistic when they were at a young age and followed up on it? The most logical solution is that maybe an artistic skill is developed by people who practice over time, but the creative mind is developed by one who isn't satisfied with what he or she is

told about things and goes to explore life on their own terms. Then can create a teaching environment that helps children learn to discover things for themselves? One of the most interesting things Monica said was “I don’t like people teaching me things, I want to learn by myself,” which echoes well with Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman and Michael Ray’s research in “The Creative Spirit”. Their research led them to the conclusion that children who attend preschools, spend more time outside discovering things or are given plenty of opportunity to exercise different ways to express themselves are likely to be more creative and well adjusted. This also supports the early learning Illinois campaign and many others that say “Children who get preschool are better prepared for life.”

What’s the solution? Everybody we have asked say they enjoyed preschool because they enjoyed the freedom. It seems pretty clear that the best way to get the creative and imaginative side out of people is to spend less time in the classroom, more time discovering the real world. More art, less report cards. Children probably don’t need more time in preschool, but more field trips, maybe art on Fridays, not just in elementary school, but beyond elementary school to continue the creative thinking.

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Jason. Personal Interview. 29 March 2007.

Jack. Personal Interview. 4 Apr. 2007

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