Chapter 1 Introduction

Creativity

Creativity has become a preoccupation of the modern age, with a high premium placed upon it by individuals and society. Numerous policy bodies promote creativity as a national and international goal, assigning a crucially important role to education in its development. However, creativity is a messy and slippery subject, ‘embarrassing, and hard to pin down’ (Pope 2005: xviii). ‘We appear uncertain as to its value, unable to decide whether it is a good or bad thing’ (Marshall 2007: 116).

Literature

Policy reports, populist self-help manuals, online discussions and books on classroom approaches all promote creativity as an unmitigated good. Evaluative theoretical accounts reflect on both positive and negative aspects, while empirical research findings from disciplines such as cognitive psychology modify and develop existing constructs of creativity.

This wide literature includes some authors and texts that operated as important way-marks at different stages of our journey. The pioneering work of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) and that of his followers, underpinned much of our thinking on creativity. Rob Pope’s insightful Creativity: History, Theory, Practice (2005) helped us to appreciate the etymology of creativity and its derivatives. The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity by James Kaufman and Robert Sternberg (2010) synthesized current thinking and research on specific creativity-related topics. Finally, Nurturing Creativity in the Classroom by Ronald Beghetto and James Kaufman (2010) provided a set of wide-ranging perspectives on the pedagogy of creativity.

Justification

We come from a western tradition which values reflexivity, so one of our reasons for producing yet another book on creativity was to clear a path through this literary undergrowth in order to map the territory and locate ourselves within it. Our exploration began with the preparation for a module on creativity in education presented to the academic staff of the Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University in Tula, Russia, where we are both honorary professors. We hope that our synthesis of the ideas developed there will help other travellers to make the same journey.

Complementing this intellectual dimension is a practical one. Many teachers feel obliged to add creativity to their pedagogical kitbag without an adequate consideration
of social, cultural and psychological confounding variables. Our primary justification stems from the comment of Beghetto who states that ‘Combining research on creativity and teacher development will go a long way in identifying and addressing lingering misconceptions about creativity and problematic practices that teachers have inherited from their own prior schooling experiences’ (Beghetto 2010: 459).

A recent OECD report by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI 2012) shows the increasing use of flexible learning spaces, multi-age groupings, team teaching, the involvement of parents and the promotion of autonomous learning, and suggests that these trends are conducive to creativity.

Paradoxes and problems

There are profound ironies in attempting to write another book on creativity in education. Creativity involves the new and unpredictable, while the overall aim of education is to develop predictable, learned behaviours for future application. In a world requiring high levels of creative thought, education systems may be encouraging processes that result in less creative people.

Other problems arise in relation to the nature of creativity. If creativity is an everyday personal quality, possessed by everyone in adapting to experience, then one may question why such a normal attribute needs to be promoted through education. On the other hand, if creativity is a special quality of exceptional individuals, then education cannot do much to promote it. Whichever way you look at it, educational intervention becomes unnecessary.

Although the goal of education to enhance fulfilment and well-being makes the encouragement of individual creativity desirable, an over-emphasis on creative production may place yet another burden on learners. One way of addressing the problem may be to view creativity as a property of social interactions, communities and societies rather than of individuals.

While we cannot attempt to resolve all these paradoxes and problems, we argue for a form of ‘pedagogized’ creativity which allots a role for education in developing the conditions under which personal and social creativity may flourish in the context of effective and meaningful teaching.

Purposes

If education is to have a role in nurturing creativity, we need to explore and interrogate the constructs and assumptions implicit in the above arguments. We hope that this book will help educators to become aware of key creativity debates, so that they can explore, clarify and articulate their own positions, since all educators base their professional practices on some aspects of theory, however derived.

Our approach in this book is deliberately similar to that of our previous work, Approaches to Learning. This involves selecting key topics implicated in creativity, drawn from a number of separate disciplines and from the specialized field of creativity research, explaining their guiding constructs in plain non-technical language. This
provides a lucid and succinct overview of their theoretical approaches, and teases out their practical implications for educational policy and classroom practice.

Since this book is an overview of the main ideas in creativity theory, it will stress the more important texts and theorists, especially in relation to new or emergent research or theoretical positions. For example, key creativity theorists such as Anna Craft, David and Arthur Cropley, Margaret Boden, Howard Gardner and Teresa Amabile present multifaceted perspectives that appear in several chapters. The repetition of key points in a number of chapters is necessary, given the different focus of each chapter, and in consideration of those readers who wish to read stand-alone chapters rather than the whole text.

By the end of the book it is hoped that readers will have a nuanced and balanced understanding of the theories underlying creativity. Knowledge of these theories provides:

- insight into the main theoretical positions held by experts;
- validation and affirmation of existing creativity practices;
- specific tools and techniques which can promote creativity;
- terminology with which to explore creativity research and topics;
- a shared discourse for engagement in the scholarship of creativity;
- justifications for personal teaching practices;
- protection from unproven and faddish ideas about creativity.

The book will be of value to teachers and learners in pre-service and in-service teacher education, postgraduate studies, curriculum design and administration. It can be read as a series of stand-alone chapters or as an integrated overview of theoretical perspectives on creativity, drawn from philosophy, literature, psychology, systems theory, sociology and pedagogy.

The book originates from a specific context of western education, so most of our examples and references are to English or North American theorists or practices, although we have attempted to incorporate non-western sources where these are illuminating. Each chapter contains:

- an accessible introduction to the theories;
- references to the constructs of creativity;
- critical insights drawn from the theories discussed;
- a summary of key ideas;
- examples and illustrations from contemporary research and practice;
- practical implications for educationalists.

**Chapter summaries**

Chapter 2, ‘Constructs of creativity’, considers the issue of creativity and the problems associated with its definition. It identifies nine constructs of creativity that together form a complex lens through which to view creativity, briefly discussing their main characteristics and their overall educational implications.
Chapter 3, ‘Genealogy of creativity’, takes a historical approach to the development of ideas about creativity, showing how constructs of creativity are influenced by the values and perceptions of the time. Each period is discussed in terms of its influence on the development of the constructs of creativity as ideas were gradually transformed over the course of time, to lead to our current perceptions.

Chapter 4, ‘Creativity in a social context’, argues that creativity is not an individual undertaking but is deeply embedded in, and influenced by social contexts which determine the forms and extents to which creativity can be manifested. The creative advantages and disadvantages possessed by certain social groups are discussed, as well as the impact of the environment.

Chapter 5, ‘Creativity and the environment’, presents a nested view of the environmental factors which affect the expression of individual creative potential in ever-broadening spheres of influence which dynamically intersect and interact in a reciprocal process. Following this overview, we focus on specific creative spaces such as the community environment, the workplace and the educational setting.

Chapter 6, ‘Creativity and culture’, discusses creativity in its cultural context, examining the extent to which different cultures value and view creativity, and considers how this is manifested in education. We treat creativity as a good thing regardless of culture, on the basis that it is increasingly perceived as an important worldwide educational policy goal, while accepting that not all cultures might agree.

Chapter 7, ‘Creativity and technology’, considers the influence of technological developments on creativity. It takes the view that technology can complement creativity by offering the support needed to transform ideas into reality. While aware of the unfulfilled promise of many technological developments in education, it suggests some possible avenues for future development.

Chapter 8, ‘Creative curriculum planning’, sees creativity not as a desirable option, but as a curricular necessity, explicitly recognized and rewarded within aims, learning intentions and criteria of assessment. It considers the balance between structured routines of study and the flexibility and variation necessary for creative activities within and across domains.

Chapter 9, ‘Assessing creativity’, deals with the nature and choice of assessment in relation to its espoused implicit definition, to the values held and to the use that is to be made of the results. It considers issues in relation to the assessment of creative thinking, people, products and environments, and describes a range of standard creativity assessment instruments.

Chapter 10, ‘Collaborative creativity’, considers the nature and value of group collaboration in creativity, including both its positive and negative aspects. Creativity is discussed as an emergent phenomenon arising from collaboration. We explore some techniques involved in creative collaboration and consider the practical implications of group creativity for education.

Chapter 11, ‘Creativity and the domains’, looks at creativity in the light of subject domains. It examines the potential for creativity in a number of representative domains, discussing the importance of requisite knowledge, highlighting differentiating characteristics and exploring the potential for creativity within each.

Chapter 12, ‘Talent, expert performance and creativity’, outlines ways in which the strategies displayed by experts in a discipline can be considered as forms of creative
thinking. It examines expertise from the perspective of talent, of cognitive problem-solving and of superior reproducible performance, and draws out the implications for education.

Chapter 13, ‘Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship’, views creativity as a practical activity leading to tangible novel products and ideas that have valued practical and economic benefits. It looks at the historical roots of innovation and entrepreneurship, and considers how they are supported and developed in practice.

Chapter 14, ‘The creative teacher’, deals with the everyday reality of being a creative teacher. Creative teaching is considered within a social and cultural context, and the practicalities of such teaching in the classroom are discussed in relation to the roles that can be adopted and the strategies that can be employed.

Chapter 15, ‘Managing creativity’, discusses creativity from the perspective of the manager. Taking broader leadership and management processes for granted, and making brief mention of organizational creativity from a systems perspective, it concentrates on the particular parts of management that relate to creativity.

Chapter 16, ‘Tools for creativity’, shows how a rational approach to thinking creatively can be displayed in a series of practical techniques. Although cautioning against ‘stand-alone’ thinking skills programmes to the exclusion of knowledge, skills and motivation, the chapter describes a selection of thinking and creativity tools and provides typical examples of how they might be used in the classroom.

Chapter 17, ‘The creative learner’, adopts the constructivist perspective that learners actively construct knowledge and have the capacity to be imaginative and creative. It suggests that creative learning can be developed in alignment with students’ epistemological development through imaginative play, creative disciplinary performance and cognitive apprenticeship, leading to independent self-regulated creativity within a scholarly discourse.

Chapter 18, ‘Creativity and cognition’, examines mental processing in relation to creativity. It explores creativity from a cognitive perspective and shows its relationship to educational practices. It considers the place of intelligence, divergent thinking, cognitive taxonomies and a staged approach to problem-solving and knowledge construction.

Chapter 19, ‘Creativity as expression’, considers the development of educational ideas that have promoted creative and artistic activities where children express themselves. It describes how creativity as a form of self-expression arose from mid-twentieth-century humanistic psychology and how it has become a necessary part of education.

Chapter 20, ‘Developmental theories and creativity’, approaches creativity from a developmental perspective. It considers a range of well-known developmental theories and discusses how creativity can be manifested and developed in a manner that is appropriate to a particular stage of development.

References

6 APPROACHES TO CREATIVITY


