

Creativity: Aspects and Importance

If you were to ask Dr. Ken Robinson about creativity, he would tell you that “creativity is as important as literacy”. Creativity can be defined as the use of the imagination and the making of ideas that are original, appropriate, and useful. (Woolfolk, 2011) In an educational world creativity has become a hot topic in and out of the classroom. Why is it needed? What are the benefits of creativity? How can teachers foster creativity? The list of questions can be endless. Researchers have tried to pinpoint the importance of creativity through longitudinal studies and observations over the years. Many have been successful and the results are thought provoking and eye opening. In order for teachers to learn how to foster creativity, they need to learn to understand what exactly creativity is and the many forms creativity can take. Upon understanding creativity, then teachers should have a goal to differentiate their instructional methods to foster creativity in their students.

In multiple polls and surveys, creativity has been identified as the number one attribute desired by employers of their employees. (Bronson & Merryman, 2010) Creativity is important for an individual’s psychological, physical, social, and career success and individuals who make creative breakthroughs tend to be inquisitive, explorers, and tinkerers as children. (Woolfolk, 2011) One major problem we face now is American children who are

testing lower in creative categories as years are passing by. One possible cause identified for this is teachers now teach to pass formal standardized testing, but according to Dr. Richardson, technology can pose a bigger problem where creativity is concerned. (Richardson, 2009) According to many experts, technology takes away the imagination and play time in children. We've all heard that TV has played a part in obesity, but now psychologists are pointing to a lack of imaginative play in children as being directly related to the lack of their creative endeavors. (Healy, 2010) Video games and technology guide the mind into specified directions many times. Now a child plays a game on a piece of electronic equipment that has a story line they follow whereas in the past, they would imagine the knights, the trials, and the triumphs.

According to Eckhoff and Urbach (2008), imagination is critical to education. The ability to produce works from the imaginative mind is a form of creativity. A child's imagination is a cognitively based endeavor that is crucial for creative thinking in formal and informal environments. (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2008) It is important to note that there is not a link between creativity and IQ; that is to say that a person's IQ level has no bearing on how creative they can be. (Kim & Tassel-Baska, 2010) Early childhood studies suggest the imagination is stimulated in young children as early as pre-school. (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009) Linking imagination and cognition was one of Vygotsky's major theories and is known as Vygotsky's laws of imagination. Vygotsky's four laws can be summed up as follows:

- Creative products of imagination are always based on one's life experiences.
- Experience is actually based on imagination.
- Emotions are a part of reality and can influence the imagination.
- Imaginations are the building blocks for new external products or inventions

According to Vygotsky, imaginative thinking begins with your own experiences, and builds upon the use of others' experiences, and can be influenced by your emotions. The product of this imagination can create external products or inventions. One example of an external product is role-playing in children. Children use their imagination to role-play and the external product is their speech and/or artistic developments from the imaginative process. Vygotsky's four laws of creativity hold that in order to think imaginatively subjects must experience disassociation. Vygotsky describes disassociation as a process where the child begins to alter their perceptions of reality. Once this happens, the process of association begins in which elements that have not previously been associated with one another are brought together, thus producing the imaginative reality. (Eckhoff & Urbach, 2010) In general, creativity requires continual reorganization of ideas, knowledge, flexibility, and social support. (Woolfolk, 2011)

Research has shown that role-playing in early childhood has a direct correlation with creativity as an adolescent. Children who role-play more,

show more creativity as an adolescent. (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009) (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Professor E. Paul Torrance is considered the father of creativity because he developed tests to measure the creative abilities in people. (Woolfolk 2011) Proponents of these tests say the results predict who the inventors and innovators are going to be as adults. As briefly mentioned earlier, one alarming trend is creativity is declining in American children, and Torrance's creativity test shows the declining numbers are most prevalent for children who are kindergarteners through sixth grade. (Bronson & Merryman, 2010). Some researchers hypothesize that children who do not engage in imaginative activities cannot become creative thinkers without learning tools for thinking creatively. (Bernard, Craft, et al, 2006) These children need training to improve their creative thinking skills. The positive side of this training is children with better creative thinking skills obtain better creative problem-solving skills. (Hong, Herzell, Green, 2009)

One hurdle easily identified for creative children is teachers may view them as the problem child. Instead of welcoming a divergent idea, or recognizing a child who thinks "outside of the box", some teachers misread their creativity as disobedience. Often creative children are labeled with having impulsivity disorders or hyperactivity disorders. (Hong, Hertzell, Green, 2009) Children who are stifled creatively may become withdrawn and uninterested in school work. Research shows these children are more likely to drop out of school as they become older. Dr. Torrance discussed how during his observations creativity was often punished by teachers and parents. (Kim &

Tassel-Baska, 2010) The logical solution would then be for the teacher to engage in exercises that rewarded creativity instead of punishing a child for it. In turn the teacher would have children in the classroom who are excited, engaged, and ready for learning.

Knowing what creativity is and knowing the importance of creativity should spur teachers to action. Teachers should consciously work at creating an environment for their students that fosters their imagination and creative abilities. According to Hong, Hartzell, and Greene (2009) there are a variety of ways teachers can begin to foster creativity in children. Using the understanding that not all children learn the same, the logical correlation with this is that not all children's creativity can be tapped in the same way. Experts urge teachers to do simple deviations in instruction such as providing choices for how to complete an assignment, and encourage new ideas and diversity in ideas. Teachers should ask students to come up with multiple ways to solve a problem. One easy way for a teacher to nurture creativity is by modeling creativity in a way that students can see and hear. A teacher should make the classroom into a creative space, engage in creative activities and ask questions to let the children move their creative ideas forward. Collaborative projects in the classroom are another way to nurture creativity. These are some of the creative options I would use in my own classroom to nurture and foster creativity in my students.

Dr. Ken Richardson tells us that the children who start school this year, will be the decision makers in the year 2060. We do not know what the future holds five years from now, much less fifty years from now. (Richardson, 2009)

One thing however is for certain; the creative mind will bring about the changes we see in our social and economic environment. Children today will affect the technology, medical breakthroughs, and the environment tomorrow. To ensure this happens for the betterment of the human race, it is the job of teachers to foster creativity in the classroom, because creativity can be taught. (Bronson & Merryman, 2010)

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