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Creativity: exploring the rhetorics and the realities

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Chapter Nine:**Creativity: Exploring the Rhetorics and the Realities****Shakuntala Banaji****Abstract**

The history of research into creativity reveals several robust and persistent trends and oppositions. Depending on the tradition to which the researcher belongs, these oppositions are associated with a series of political and philosophical presuppositions about human beings and society that are seldom traced back to their historical roots. Recent trends see creative activity as both a cure for the ills of an increasingly troubled society, and as a charm to unlock the potential and boost the morale of demotivated and excluded sections of children and youth, the populace, the community or the work-force. Research suggests, however, that in quite specific ways creative teaching and learning are neither understood properly, nor given more than superficial significance in the criteria by which students and teachers in many settings are now judged. Via an exploration of a number of contemporary and persistent political and philosophical traditions in the theorising of creativity, this chapter asks: to what extent are any of these claims a reflection of actual events, trends and practices? Whose interests do some of these conceptualisations serve? And are there any ways in which the insights about creativity emerging from different traditions may be made to work on behalf of children and teachers?

Introduction: The Rhetorics of Creativityⁱ

This chapter explores understandings of creativity in relation to social relations, play and pedagogy in policy and practice: where these understandings come from in terms of their theoretical heritage, what functions they serve, how they are used, and in whose interest. The focus is on discourses about creativity circulating in the public domain. The aim here is not to investigate creativity itself,

but rather what is written and said about it. Creativity is thus presented here as something *constructed through discourse*, and the ensuing discussion aims to envision more clearly how such constructions work, what claims are being made, and how we might choose to locate ourselves in relation to these claims. In the critical review of literature from which this chapter originates, (Banaji and Burn 2007), the rhetorics of creativity are given names which broadly correspond to the main theoretical underpinnings or the ideological beliefs of those who deploy them. Thus, the rhetorics referred to in this chapter are as follows:

- Creative Genius;
- Democratic Creativity and Cultural Re/Production;
- Ubiquitous Creativity;
- Creativity for Social Good;
- Creativity as Economic Imperative;
- Play and Creativity;
- Creativity and Cognition;
- The Creative Affordances of Technology;
- The Creative Classroom and Creative Arts and Political Challenge

The rhetorics identified have complex histories, particularly in traditions of philosophical thought about creativity since the European Enlightenment and in parallel forms of artistic practice, and in traditions of educational theory and practice related to creativity and play over the same period. In coming sections, following brief historical descriptions, the rhetorics are traced through in academic and policy discourses or, via reference to other research, in the discourse of students and teachers.

The discussion of individual rhetorics raises a series of questions that cut across and connect several rhetorics to each other. For instance, two questions running through the rhetorics of Genius, Democratic and Ubiquitous creativity are: Does creativity reside in everyday aspects of human life or is it something special? And what are the differences between 'cultural learning' and 'creative learning'?

Writing on creativity in education distinguishes between creative teaching and creative learning but often fails to establish precisely how such processes and the practices they entail differ from 'good' or 'effective' teaching and 'engaged' or 'enthusiastic' learning. Thus the issue of whether there is, in fact, any difference between 'good' pedagogy and 'creative' pedagogy is the focus of attention in a number of the rhetorics from those that see Creativity as a Social Good to those that deal with students and the classroom. Meanwhile, the questions of how significant play and individual socialisation are as components of creativity link rhetorics as diverse as those concerned with Technology and the Economy to Cognitive and Play theories.

More specifically, in the context of this volume, this analysis contextualises positions taken up by diverse groups of parents, academics, educators and policy-makers with regard to the uses of digital technologies by children and young people. The concerns of those who view media technologies as inhibiting children's apparently 'natural' creativity and those who view poor teaching as inhibiting the creative potentials of technology are aired alongside accounts of the actual uses to which teachers and children are putting new digital technologies. The following sections lay the groundwork for this discussion by examining rhetorics about the nature of creativity, its potential transmission and measurement, as well as about the space for creative participation in varied economic and educational contexts.

Creativity: Unique or Democratic?

The rhetoric which could be said to have the oldest provenance and to have remained resilient, albeit in more subtle guises, within educational pedagogies in the 20th and 21st century, is that of **Creative Genius**. This is a romantic and post-romantic rhetoric that dismisses modernity and popular culture as vulgar, and argues for creativity as a special quality of a few highly educated and disciplined

individuals (who possess genius) and of a few cultural products. Culture in this rhetoric is defined by a particular discourse about aesthetic judgment and value, manners, civilization and the attempt to establish literary, artistic and musical canons. It can be traced back through certain phases of the Romantic period to aspects of European Enlightenment thought. Perhaps the most influential Enlightenment definition of genius is in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, which presents genius as the 'mental aptitude' necessary for the production of fine art, a capacity characterised by originality, and opposed to imitation.

Some contemporary commentators remain implicitly attached to the idea of genius (Simonton 1999, Scruton 2000). This view is interestingly at odds with a common definition of creativity as needing to involve novelty. In an essay entitled 'After Modernism' (2000), Roger Scruton draws a distinction between inspired and vulgar architecture:

Our best bet in architecture is that the artistic geniuses should invest their energy...in patterns that can be reproduced at will by the rest of us.... In making innovation and experiment into the norm, while waging war against ornament, detail, and the old vernaculars, modernism led to a spectacular loss of knowledge among ordinary builders and to a pretension to originality in a sphere where originality, except in the rare hands of genius, is a serious threat to the surrounding order. (Scruton 2000)

Notably, while the language used here counterposes the ordinary with the exceptional, there is a sense in which 'novelty' is viewed as a negative, almost dangerous, attribute when proposed by those who do not possess the requisite skill and inspiration to maintain a link with what is seen to be the best in the past. Scruton is not alone in his concerns about the debasement of 'real' Art, the rejection of 'training', 'rules', 'traditions' and so on. Websites such as 'The Illinois Loop' (a supposedly critical look at school education in that state) pride themselves on taking issue with 'creative' aspects of the modern arts curriculum.

When your 6th grader comes home and proudly shows you the "art project" he made in school from shoeboxes, duct tape, and spray paint, a valid question is, "Is my child learning anything about art?" In the context of the art program itself, the overwhelming emphasis in most schools is on art as a *hobby and craft*, with heavy favoritism of "creative" projects (painting an album cover, decorating a hub cap, etc.). **Yes, it's fun. And some of the projects are indeed delightful. And no one doubts that kids should have time to be kids and let their creativity thrive.** But what is missing? (<http://www.illinoisloop.org/artmusic.html>, emphasis in original)

The view of art as being about self-expression is derided as a mere loss of skill and in some cases as an apology for absent skills. Significantly for the rhetorics **Play and Creativity**, and **The Creative Classroom**, such discussions caricature the supposed 'opposition' and mobilise parental concern around a constructed binary opposition between 'pointless playing around' (creativity) and 'real learning' (academic progression within a sanctioned tradition).

Many educators and parents still operate within frameworks such as those outlined above. For instance, fears abound that allowing teachers and children time within English lessons use or 'play' with mother-tongue languages, television programmes, blogs or make other forms of digital media will mean a loss of all structure, traditional literacy and discipline. In many contemporary national educational contexts (Cremin, Comber and Wolf, 2007) policy reactions have tended to be against this caricature of 'everything goes' *laisse faire* rather than in the light of real classroom practices. It has been argued (Maisuria, 2005; Kwek, Albright and Kramer-Dahl, 2007) that recent trends in assessment in the UK and elsewhere tend to focus on the transmission and acquisition of isolated skills and bits of canonical knowledge, thus missing the long-term impact of

creative learning experiences which can be assessed formatively through self-critique and joint commentaries.

In this context, attempting to make creative teaching more palatable to those who believe in canonical knowledge and a transmission-orientated curriculum, some commentators write as if there are two different 'categories' of creativity. These have been dubbed, variously, 'high' and 'common' (Cropley 2001) or 'Historical' and 'Psychological' (Boden 1990) or 'special' and 'everyday'. The former comprises the work and powers of those who are considered 'geniuses' in the rhetoric just examined. It is pursued via studies of the work and lives of 'great' creative individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) and is seen as being 'absolute'. The latter more relative notion – which argues that creativity can be fostered, increased and measured – can also, broadly, be split into two traditions: one grounded in culture or subculture; the other based on notions of 'possibility thinking' and dubbed little 'c' creativity (Craft 1999).

Providing an explicitly anti-elitist conceptualisation of creativity as inherent in the everyday cultural and symbolic practices of all human beings, is a rhetoric relating to **Democratic Creativity and Cultural Re/Production**. This rhetoric, most familiar in the academic discipline of Cultural Studies, sees everyday cultural practices in relation to the cultural politics of identity construction. It focuses particularly on the meanings made from and with popular cultural products. This rhetoric provides a theory derived from the Gramscian perspective on youth sub-cultures developed by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. It constitutes practices of cultural consumption (especially of films, magazines, fashion and popular music) as forms of production through activities such as music sampling, subcultural clothing and fan activity (Cunningham, 1998); and thus belongs to an influential strand of cultural studies which attributes considerable creative agency to those social groups traditionally perceived as audiences and consumers or even as excluded from creative work by virtue of their social status (Willis 1990). In a different incarnation, it can be

seen at work in the arguments of David Gauntlett (2007: 19-25) who locates visual 'making' and communication (video diaries, building block constructions) as central to processes of creative identity expression.

Similarly egalitarian, but without the basis in cultural politics, is the rhetoric of **Ubiquitous Creativity**. Here, creativity is not just about consumption and production of artistic products, whether popular or elite, but involves a skill in terms of responding to the demands of everyday life. To be more creative, in this discourse, involves having the flexibility to respond to problems and changes in the modern world and one's personal life (Craft 1999, 2003). While much of the writing in this rhetoric is targeted at early years education with the aim of giving young children the ability to deal reflexively and ethically with problems encountered during learning and family life, examples used to illustrate 'everyday creativity' include attempts by working-class individuals or immigrants to find jobs against the odds without becoming discouraged. This too is a resilient strand in commentaries on this subject and has a strong appeal for educators (Jeffrey 2005, Cohen 2000) who wish to emphasise the significance of ethical, life-based education that does not rely on the transmission of particular traditionally judged knowledge and skills.

Clearly for those who see creativity as something 'special' or 'arts-based', or indeed who see it as being about challenge and social critique, this approach remains problematic. Negus and Pickering (2004) develop a strong critique of little 'c' creativity, arguing that

...we cannot collapse creativity into everyday life, as if they are indistinguishable.... Only certain of our everyday experiences involve creativity; only some of our everyday actions are creative. ... What we're arguing for instead are the intrinsic connections *between* creative practice and everyday life, for it's important that we don't forget how the heightened moments of creativity are always linked to routine and the daily round, and how a particular

artwork or cultural product may catch us within the midst of ordinary habitual life. (2004: 44-45)

While this view de-links creativity from mundane activities while allowing for its location alongside the everyday, it leaves in place the tensions between activities, ideas and products that are socially accepted as 'creative' in particular historical moments and those that are rejected for fear of their playful, disruptive or anarchic potential. Thus even the work of artists such as William Blake or political philosophers such as Karl Marx, while acknowledged by some as extraordinarily creative, has also been feared by many for encouraging uncharted, troublesome and subversive ways of feeling, thinking and relating within society. The following section explores further the implicit tension between a wish to foster the socially acceptable, benevolent effects of creativity (embodied in academic and economic success) and the current aversion in schools and academic institutions to pedagogic activity which encourages fantasy play or socio-political critique.

Creative Socialisation and 'Successful' Societies?

The rhetoric of **Creativity for Social Good** sees individual creativity as linked to social structures. This rhetoric is characterised by its emphasis on the importance for educational policy of the arts as tools for personal empowerment and ultimately for social regeneration (the NACCCE report: Robinson et al 1999). It stresses the integration of communities and individuals who have become 'socially excluded' (for example by virtue of race, location or poverty) and generally invokes educational and, tangentially, economic concerns as the basis for generating policy interest in creativity. This rhetoric emerges largely from contemporary social democratic discourses of inclusion and multiculturalism. In this view, a further rationale for encouraging creativity in education focuses on the social and personal development of young people. This encompasses a bow

to multiculturalism (Robinson et al 1999: 22-23) and anti-racism, as well as an avowed desire to combat growing drug-use, teenage alcoholism and other social problems. In this view, 'creative and cultural programmes' are seen to be two-fold mechanisms of social cohesion, 'powerful ways of revitalising the sense of community in a school and engaging the whole school with the wider community' (Ibid, 26).

Although Robinson's NACCCE committee team accept that exceptionally gifted creative individuals do exist, their report favours a 'democratic' definition of creativity over an 'elite' one: 'Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value' (1999: 29). For them imaginative activity entails a process of generating something original, whether this be an idea or a relationship between existing ideas. This immediately sets it apart from discourses which might be seen to encourage a view of creative and imaginative activity as play or fantasy. The NACCCE report is implicitly suggesting that the preparatory and exploratory time in art, media, technology and drama classrooms and projects is only valuable insofar as it contributes to the final product or to the reinsertion of 'excluded youth' into the official school system. Culture and other cultures are things to be 'dealt with' and 'understood'. While this reductive view has been implicitly critiqued on various occasions (Marshall 2001, Buckingham and Jones 2001) it has a broad appeal amongst those who see creativity as a tool in the project of engineering a strong national society.

In an allied rhetoric, **Creativity as Economic Imperative**, the future of a competitive national economy is seen to depend on the knowledge, flexibility, personal responsibility and problem solving skills of workers and their managers (cf. Scholtz and Livingstone 2005). These are, apparently, fostered and encouraged by creative methods in business, education and industry (Seltzer and Bentley 1999). There is a particular focus here on the contribution of the 'creative industries', broadly defined, although the argument is often applied to the commercial world more generally. This rhetoric annexes the concept of

creativity in the service of a neo-liberal economic programme and discourse (Landry 2000). Indeed, although they claim to be interested in a diversity of contexts, flexibility of learning, self-evaluation and student empowerment, much of Seltzer's and Bentley's emphasis is directed towards getting more IT literacy and knowledge of computers into the curriculum and getting young people into industrial/business placements at an early stage, whether in school or university. Instead of being about imagination (which at least plays a role in the NACCCE report) or about the motivation to learn and create, the imperative here is the requirement to assist the modern national capitalist economy in its quest for global expansion.

Training courses in 'creativity', promising anything from personal fulfilment and office bonding to higher profits and guaranteed jobs, abound both on and off-line¹. But, realistically, we must ask questions about the variety of arenas and domains in which those who buy into this 'new' vision of creativity would be allowed to function. It is unlikely that time for playful testing of ideas would be built into the working days of 'knowledge workers'. Perhaps they would have to accommodate such necessary but peripheral business in their own personal time by giving up leisure (as is increasingly the case with the penetration of work-related ICT in the home). And in what way might different skills lead to creative production? It seems unlikely that the mere acquisition of skills would be enough as a contribution to a greater collective or corporate endeavour. Clearly, while the newly flexible workforce described by Seltzer and Bentley (1999) might be encouraged to manage themselves and their departments or sections, their control over the overall structures and practices of their organisations might remain as limited as ever. Indeed, as Rob Pope (2005: 28) poignantly describes with regard to two of the companies presented as shining examples of such

¹ See, for instance, the websites for *Creative Thinking and Lateral Thinking Techniques*, (2003) available at <http://www.brainstorming.co.uk/tutorials/creativethinkingcontents.html> and *Creativity Unleashed Limited* (2003) managerial training website at <http://www.cul.co.uk/>

newly creative practices in *The Creative Age*, jobs and livelihoods may be no more secure if workers become 'creative' and 'flexible' than those in very 'old fashioned' manufacturing jobs that did not fall within the scope of the so-called 'knowledge economy'.

Serious or Playful Stuff?

The rhetoric of **Creativity and Cognition** can be seen as incorporating two quite different traditions. One tradition includes theories of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993) and the development of models to document and increase people's problem solving capacity (for instance, Osborn-Parnes' 1941 CPS model) as well as explorations of the potential of artificial intelligence (Boden 1990). This latter work attempts to demonstrate the links made during, and the conditions for, creative thought and production. The emphasis of all strands in this tradition is nevertheless on the *internal* production of creativity by the mind, rather than on external contexts and cultures. The other tradition consists of more intra-cognitive and culturally situated notions of creative learning expounded by Vygotsky (1994), who asserts that 'If a person "cannot do something that is not directly motivated by an actual situation" then they are neither free nor using imagination or creativity' (1994: 267). He writes:

Our ability to do something meaningless, absolutely useless and which is elicited neither by external nor internal circumstances, has usually been regarded as the clearest indication of the wilfulness of resolve and freedom of action which is being performed.... [thus] ... imagination and creativity are linked to a free reworking of various elements of experience, freely combined, and which, as a precondition, without fail, require the level of inner freedom of thought, action and cognising which only he who has mastered thinking in concepts can achieve. (1994: 269)

The importance given to 'freedom' of thought and action and to non-goal orientated playful activity in Vygotsky's writing about adolescent learning remains controversial in educational or economic environments where the ability to plan a project and execute it, solve a problem or pass a test are markers of effectiveness. Controversially for some, the emphasis in this theorizing is on developing patterns of thought and conceptual understanding in particular social and cultural settings ('various elements of experience') rather than on mastering a canon or a body of knowledge.

What may be termed 'inter-cognitive' theories of cognition, spanning a spectrum from psychometric tests and scales to 'experimental' studies on groups of young people or lecturers, have been heavily utilized to 'prove' the existence and/or the level of benefit of retaining a place for 'creativity' in formal educational settings. More flexible indicators of creativity such as the various 'Intelligences' described by Gardner have been used on occasion in a positive manner to soften the harshness of traditional literacy and numeracy-based academic assessment. Vygotsky's far more critical and unusual theorizing, however, has been largely ignored by contemporary policy makers. Yet Vygotsky never denies that creativity has concrete results, or that these cannot at some point be evaluated. In fact, to him, 'It is the creative character of concrete expression and the construction of a new image which exemplify fantasy. Its culminating point is the achievement of a concrete form, but this form can only be attained with the help of abstraction.' (1994: 283). The point here is that creativity requires patience and an appreciation of the playful, and perhaps the fanciful and insubstantial.

A persistent strand in writing about creativity and intersecting another set of rhetorics that centre on childhood, the rhetoric of **Play and Creativity** turns on the notion that childhood play models, and perhaps scaffolds, adult problem solving and creative thought. It explores the functions of play in relation to both creative production and cultural consumption. Some cognitivist approaches to play do share the emphasis of the 'Creative Classroom' rhetoric on the

importance of divergent thinking. Sandra Russ, for instance, argues that '[p]lay has been found to facilitate insight ability and divergent thinking' (2003: 291), and that 'theoretically play fosters the development of cognitive and affective processes that are important in the creative act' (2003: 291). Challenging a mainstay of the economic conceptualisation of creativity, she sees children as being excluded by definitions of creative products as effective, novel and valuable. Like Carruthers (2002) she argues that the ways in which children use language, toys, role-plays and objects to represent different things in play are habitual ways of practising divergent thinking skills. Accounts such as these raise questions for those interested in creativity, pedagogy and learning. For example, there is widespread concern (cf. Brennan 2005, Maisuria 2005) about the way in which childhood pretence and play are being squeezed out of the school curriculum to be replaced by the learning of rules and appropriate roles, rote literacy tasks and an approximation of 'adult'-type problem solving tasks. Brennan suggests that 'pretend play... is both a learning and teaching tool' and asserts that 'a play curriculum inherently recognises the inseparability of emotion and cognition, and consequently of care and education and values the bio-ecological context in which both are embedded' (2004: 307, 308). The stories in her report which 'assess' children's learning and creativity through play are all told with a sensitivity to the contexts and relationships in the lives of participants, as well as the immediate tools and goals achieved. Most significantly, extrapolating from the manner of assessment described here, there is a recognition that playful learning and creative experiences form a continuum rather than being isolated units which can be measured and enumerated with any degree of authenticity. In such rhetorical constructions, opportunities for and contexts of play – whether isolated or social, informal or planned, analogue or digital – are more or less linked to opportunities for creative thought and action. It would appear, perhaps, that all advocates of 'free' play time and space for children are aiming to increase children's creativity.

But not all those who champion play do so in ways that are conducive to the freedom of thought, creative action or divergent and critical thinking that are suggested in other rhetorics as being the prime ingredients of creativity. Nor, indeed, as Shanly Dixon and Sandra Webber's chapter 'Play Spaces, Childhood and Video games' (2007) shows, are all rhetorics of Play and Creativity motivated by the same goals and histories. They continue important discussions (Sutton-Smith 2001) about the links between adults' nostalgia for a remembered context of play in their own childhoods and emerging, ingrained and often naturalised social rhetorics about play in modern children's lives. Taking to task those who mourn the 'death' of an era when play was outdoors, safe, free and unmediated, they write:

In response to both panic and nostalgia, adults are increasingly organizing and regulating their children's play. Contemporary childhood is now constructed by adults as a space where children must continuously be engaged in activities that are productive. There is an expectation that play must serve some higher purpose: for instance, children play to learn, children play to burn off excess energy, children play for exercise. Play is no longer an objective in and of itself (Sutton-Smith, 1997). As a result... free play is becoming an oxymoron rather than a logical coupling of complementary words. (2007: 25)

In quite specific ways this discussion can be seen to mirror discourses that have emerged with regard to creativity, technology and (new) media. Cordes and Miller, for instance, assert that

'[c]reativity and imagination are prerequisites for innovative thinking, which will never be obsolete in the workplace. Yet a heavy diet of ready-made computer images and programmed toys appear to stunt imaginative thinking. Teachers report that children in our electronic society are becoming alarmingly deficient in generating their own images and ideas' (2000: 4).

But the fact that certain commentators, possibly with nostalgic memories of socially privileged childhoods and an exaggerated paranoia about 'modern' media, might overstate the case against digital playtime does not mean that all technology-based play and learning are either harmful or necessarily beneficial to children's creativity.

A Digital 'Creativity Pill' or a Damaging Potion?

If creativity is not inherent in human mental powers and is, in fact, social and situational, then technological developments may well be linked to advances in the creativity of individual users. The rhetoric constructed around **The Creative Affordances of Technology** covers a range of positions from those who applaud all technology as inherently creative to those that welcome it cautiously and see creativity as residing in an as yet under-theorised relationship between users and applications). But it is worth asking how democratic notions of creativity are linked to technological change in this rhetoric. Is the use of technology itself inherently creative? And how do concerns raised by opponents of new technology affect arguments about creative production?

For Avril Loveless (2002), because of a complex set of features of ICT (provisionality, interactivity, capacity, range, speed and automatic functions), digital technologies open up new and authentic ways of being creative 'in ways which have not been as accessible or immediate without new technologies' (2002: 2). Loveless (1999) explores some of the issues arising with regard to visual literacy and multimedia work for classroom teachers. She notes that during the Glebe School project, in addition to the generation of great enthusiasm and enjoyment during the use of visual packages on the computer, the question of evaluation was not forgotten by the children who 'had a sense of ownership of their images and lively ideas on how they might adapt or improve them in the future' (1999: 38). Viewing their digital media projects, the children felt that the

finished pieces did not look like “children’s work” (Ibid 39), and would hence be taken more seriously by adults evaluating and appreciating them. Teachers however expressed a variety of concerns about the potentials and actuality of such ICT-related projects for their students and themselves. They were concerned about their own levels of understanding and skill in relation to the software. Given this context, Loveless argues that technology, which is now being used in schools in varieties of ways, can enhance creative learning, but only if teachers’ anxieties are handled sensitively via ‘the *strategic* approach to the use of ICT’ through the application of skills, ‘rather than skills training associated with specific packages’ (1999: 40 emphasis in original).

Implicitly addressing many of the concerns aired in educational circles (Healy 1998, Reid, Burn and Parker 2002) about the apparently empty ‘showiness’ of digital products by children, Loveless (2003: 13-14) cautions against using tools and techniques in digital creations so that one can say that children’s work is technology-enhanced. Regardless of the technological tools being used by the children in their work, she suggests that it is the meanings being produced by the children in their projects, the children’s and teachers’ sense of confidence with and ownership of their tools, and ongoing pedagogic negotiations that will aid or hinder creative production. Supporting this socially situated view of the *potentially* creative uses of digital technologies in their riposte to one particularly wide-ranging and trenchant critique (Cordes and Miller 2000), Douglas Clements and Julie Sarama (2003) cite studies that document what they call ‘increases in creativity’ and as well as better peer relations following interactive experiences with computer programmes such as Logo. However, challenging those who champion digital technologies as *inherently* creative, like Scanlon et al (2005) and Seiter (2005), they also note that many computer programmes designed to increase children’s knowledge and skills are not in the least bit creative, relying on rote learning, repetition and drill exercises. Thus they argue that digital technology can, but does not necessarily, support the expression and development of creativity.

Sefton-Green (1999: 146-147) notes that successful digital projects with children and youth are all heavily intensive in terms of time, staff and resources. Here, despite the enthusiasm generated, 'the organisation of the school day with its narrow subject disciplines, short working periods, and heavy assessment load' (page?) are seen as opposed to the principles of digital arts work and as inhibiting the success of such projects particularly in secondary school. Furthermore, the projects in Sefton-Green's collection all raise significant questions about the evaluation of creative work in new media more generally: 'Do we evaluate students' grasp of authoring packages or their capacity to imagine in the new medium?', 'When is a product genuinely interactive and when does it merely ape fashionable conventions?' (1999:149). In a society where technology is not equally available to all, children may well be enthusiastic and confident users of digital technologies when offered the opportunities for playful production, but they are still divided by inequalities of access outside school and across the school system (Ibid 153). Ultimately the social contexts of digital technology's use may help or hinder its creative potential.

Evaluation, Learning and Pedagogy

Pertinently for those interested in creativity and communication, placing itself squarely at the heart of educational practice, **The Creative Classroom** rhetoric focuses on pedagogy, investigating questions about the connections between knowledge, skills, literacy, teaching and learning and the place of creativity in an increasingly regulated and monitored curriculum (Cf. Beetlestone 1998, Starko 2005, Jeffrey 2005). The focal point of this rhetoric is frequently practical advice to educators in both formal and informal settings about ways of encouraging and improving the learning of young people. This rhetoric locates itself in pragmatic accounts of 'the craft of the classroom', rather than in academic theories of mind or culture. Creative learning is *interactive*, incorporating discussion, social

context, sensitivity to others, the acquisition and improvement of literacy skills; it is *contextual*, and has a sense of *purpose* and thus cannot be based around small units of testable knowledge; however, it can also be thematic and highly specific as it often arises out of stories or close observation, which engage the imagination and the emotions as well as learners' curiosity about concepts and situations.

In this view, in terms of the content of creative lessons, it is vital that concepts are not taught as being fixed and immutable entities but as contextually and culturally anchored; subject divisions too need to be seen as frequently arbitrary and socially constructed rather than as rigid and binding; for it is in crossing such divisions – between art and mathematics, physical activity, numeracy, languages and music, geography and science, philosophy and poetry that children (and adults) stand the greatest chance of being independently creative. All this is unquestionably sound advice. Indeed, the Creative Classroom rhetoric is consistent in identifying holistic teaching and learning – which link playful processes to different types and domains of knowledge and methods of communication – as more compatible with and conducive to creative thought and production than the increasingly splintered, decontextualised, top-down and monitored content and skills which are favoured as being academically 'effective'. There is, however, a tension in this work between what could broadly be defined as a rather romantic wish to view creativity as something that enhances the human soul and helps young people to blossom, and the need to give practical advice to trainee teachers, thus fitting them for the fairly chaotic but restricted milieu into which they will soon be going. At points this tension is productive, or at the very least practical, in the sense that it prevents the educational perspective on creativity from sidestepping issues such as assessment and time management that are of very real significance for practitioners both in formal educational and more unorthodox settings.

The examples of 'creative teaching' given exemplify the tightrope that many educators have to walk between institutional constraints and the fragility of their constructed 'creative' environment. However, at times the tension also appears to lead to contradiction or even paradox: risk-taking is to be encouraged but it is also to be kept within easily controllable bounds; time is required for playful engagement with ideas and materials, but this time has stringent external parameters in terms of the school day. Alpesh Maisuria argues powerfully that the interventions of recent governments in education have created a culture of 'vocationalisation', 'standardization' and 'rubber stamp' testing which has all but killed the space for creative pedagogy, playful exploration and creative work in the classroom:

Performance indicators and standards inspectorates culminate in teachers avoiding risks (Campbell, 1998). Teachers are positioned in a catch-22 situation where they are inclined to conform to the curriculum specification rather than indulge in vibrant and energised pedagogy driven by ingenuity. Teachers do not encourage independent thinking and elaborate innovations because the curriculum and standards criteria do not recognise unorthodox creative expressionism (Davis, 2000). (Maisuria, 2005: 143

While it is clear that a number of students continue to work in imaginative and divergent ways, and that some teachers still encourage them to do so by valuing playful or subversive discussion and creative production with new or traditional technologies, the literature on creativity in contemporary classroom settings suggest that this is despite, rather than because of, current education policies. In their study of the ways in which university staff and students experience and understand creativity, Oliver et al's interviews uncover a number of experiences and patterns that fit in with the rhetorics outlined so far: a liking for creative or inspirational teachers/lecturers and a sense that being around enthusiastic, critical and engaged individuals enhances creativity; a dislike of dogmatic teaching, deadlines, narrow theoretical parameters, subject hierarchies which

devalue drama and the arts in relation to mathematics and science; depression at the lack of reward for critical or divergent work and about forced targets; as well as anxieties around performing creativity 'on demand' and being shown as uncreative in front of other students were frequently expressed. However, highlighting institutional barriers to individual and group creativity, 'in many students' comments there was a sense of frustration at a perceived conflict between being creative and being "academic"' (2006: 54).

Although not considered in detail here, in response to such institutional realities, and setting a challenge to aspects of foregoing rhetorics, **Creative Arts and Political Challenge** sees art and participation in creative education as necessarily politically challenging, and potentially transformative of the consciousness of those who engage in it. It describes the processes of institutional pressure that militate against positive and challenging experiences of creativity by young people, regardless of the efforts of teachers and practitioners (Thomson, Hall and Russell, 2006). In previous work on this topic (Banaji and Burn 2007; Banaji and Burn 2007a), this rhetoric is pursued further, with an emphasis on questions it raises about creative partnerships, social contexts and political or philosophical presuppositions. If one wishes to retain the idea of cultural creativity as having an oppositional rather than a merely socialising force, it is important not to lose sight of the ways in which broader inflections of discourses of creativity relate to the micro-politics of particular social settings. The very fluidity and confusion in talk about creativity in the classroom can mean that the term is used as window dressing to appease educators who are interested in child-centred learning without actually being incorporated into the substantive work of the classroom.

Conclusion

In exploring questions about the nature and significance of creativity via engagement with symptomatic texts that use one or more of the different rhetorics this chapter has raised a number of issues. The public discourse on creativity is characterised by a lack of clarity that allows participants to gain the benefits of aligning themselves with conflicting or mutually incompatible ideas and views without being seen to do so. In the 1990s the rush to install computers in schools apparently to aid children's digital creativity and their preparedness for a modern economy has been accompanied by hysteria about how computer use impairs traditional literacy and creativity. Similarly, various proponents of creative arts in the classroom have claimed for arts projects a huge democratising effect while in practice holding firmly elitist beliefs about artistic and literary products. One of the dangers of purely cognitivist conceptions of creativity is that they lose a sense of cultural groundedness, provenance, and of the cultural experiences of learners prior to any given educational experience, whether within or beyond formal education. In an educational context, the emphasis on creativity is part of an effort to draw back from the perceived excesses of a highly regulated, performance-based audit culture and to recover something that existed before, whether this be called 'enjoyment', 'good teaching' or 'creativity' without, however, losing apparent 'excellence' and 'standards'. Unfortunately, given that currently 'excellence' and 'standards' are criteria that are set by the very 'audit culture' from which The Creative Classroom and Play and Creativity rhetorics hope to depart, there is a significant issue here in terms of the emphasis which is given by those carrying out assessments to processes of learning or creating and the products or the absence thereof. We are left with the question: Is play uncreative if it does not produce a tangible product?

Another strong strand identified in this chapter is a relatively bland discourse of pro-social intervention: creative projects and strategies that encourage tolerance, co-operation and social harmony. A sharper version of that argument posits creativity as being about social inclusion and cultural diversity. In the name of creativity, this rhetoric uses broad aspirational terms such as empowerment and

democratisation, although the precise nature of the goals that are sought often remains unclear. But assessing whether any of the grand or even the more modest political ambitions of particular rhetorics and creative projects have been achieved is not easy. How do we assess whether or not children have been empowered or local communities made more tolerant or workforces made more collaborative? It is crucial that we understand and respond to the relationship between the *cultural politics* of talk about creativity or play and a *wider politics*. While there is evidence from numerous studies (Balshaw 2004, Starko 2005) that creative ways of teaching and learning, and creative projects in the arts, humanities and the sciences, offer a wider range of learners a more enjoyable, flexible and independent experience of education than some traditional methods, there is no evidence that simply giving young people or workers brief opportunities for creative play or work substantially alters social inequalities, exclusions and injustices. Creativity is not a substitute for social justice.

There is a complex and not always clearly identifiable *cultural politics* behind many rhetorics of creativity as there is behind educational rhetorics and the rhetorics of play. This is the case not only within discourses which explicitly address questions about power, and about whose culture is seen as legitimate and whose is not. It is also the case in discourses where constructions of power remain implicit, such as those which celebrate 'high art' as 'civilising', child art as being about an 'expression of the soul', or which see the development of workers' creativity as being 'for the good of the national economy' and a constant testing and attributions of levels of ability to children as a way of raising 'standards'. The word 'productive', when used in relation to children's play, is especially poignant in terms of discursive constructions of creativity and the social structures which inform them. It belies all the supposed emphasis on 'freedom' and 'agency' in discussions of childhoods past and present. As may be observed in case-studies included in this volume, most children do not measure the quality of the time they have spent playing by the its 'products', whether psychic or practical. The suspicion evinced by some parents and educators with

regard to the amount of time children spend watching television, reading blogs or playing computer games rather than reading or playing cricket can be seen to spring from complex social discourses about 'healthy' play and 'harmful' play, about what is recognized as creative versus what is labeled as 'derivative' and about what children want to do in their spare time. Less significant than the specifics of what aspect of creativity is sanctioned and what is not at any given historical moment, is the fact that some rhetorics explicitly legitimise certain forms of cultural expression and certain goals and implicitly de-legitimise others. Whether the labels 'digital' and 'creative' are applied pejoratively or to applaud, some contemporary rhetorics can and do aid social gate-keeping by stigmatising particular pedagogies and parenting choices. Rhetorics of creativity are, then, always political, even when they appear not to be.

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