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The Role Of Creativity In Art Education: Theory And Practice

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Abstract: Creativity is a fundamental component of art education, shaping both theoretical approaches and practical applications. This paper explores the significance of creativity in fostering artistic expression, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students. It examines various educational theories, including constructivism and experiential learning, that emphasize the role of creativity in developing a well-rounded artistic identity. Additionally, the study highlights practical strategies for nurturing creativity in the classroom, such as open-ended projects, interdisciplinary approaches, and student-centered learning. The paper also addresses challenges in integrating creativity into standardized curricula and offers recommendations for educators to balance structure with artistic freedom. By bridging theory and practice, this research underscores the transformative power of creativity in art education and its broader implications for personal and professional development.

Introduction:

Lack of agreement about a common definition of creativity may undermine consideration of the concept being included in school curricula by practically minded school administrators (Coleman & Cross, 2001). Many contemporary psychologists and educators agree that creativity is a complex process that can be viewed as an interactive system in which relationships among persons, processes, products, and social and cultural contexts are of paramount importance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1999; Gruber, 1989; Sternberg, 1999). All creative work, according to Sternberg (1999), happens in one or more domains. People are not creative in a general sense; they are creative in particular domains such as the visual arts. Talented individuals fit well in certain domains of knowledge within their own cultures and are recognized as highly competent by members in their fields of expertise (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1982; Gardner, 1999; Winner & Martino, 1993). Creative persons, however, often do not fit easily within a domain of knowledge, and it is only after much time and effort that they may be able to establish a body of work that comes to be valued. Creativity from this point of view is an individual characteristic as a person reacts with one or more systems within a particular social context.

Different conceptions about the relationship between intelligence and creativity, however, make it difficult for agreement to be reached about a common definition of creativity. Some researchers assert that to be creative, a person needs intelligence, but not all intelligent people have high creative potential (Davis & Rimm, 1998; Renzulli & Reiss, 1985). MacKinnon (1965) argued that a basic level of IQ of about 120 is necessary for creative productivity, although some researchers posit there is no direct relationship between

creativity and intelligence. Sternberg (2001), however, differentiated between intelligence and creativity and viewed intelligence as advancing societal norms and creativity as opposing societal norms and proposing new norms. As a result of case studies of adults who achieved success in the arts and sciences, Feist (1999) concluded that giftedness, measured by high IQ scores, might not be a good indicator of adult creative achievement, and that the relationship between creativity and intelligence was small as most creative people do not conform to conventional ways of knowing.

Many scholars concur that creative achievement is reflected in production of useful, new ideas or products that result from defining a problem and solving it in a novel way within a particular cultural context (Hunsaker & Callahan, 1995; McPherson, 1997; Mumford, Connely, Baughman, & Marks, 1994; Wakefield, 1992). There is, however, another source of difficulty about defining creativity

in that a number of scholars distinguish between expert, adult creative acts and those of children. Some think that children can demonstrate talent in a number of areas, but cannot be creative because creativity involves changing a domain and ways of thinking within that domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1999; Winner and Martino, 1993). A case can be made, on the other hand, for differentiating creativity at an individual level as a person solves problems in daily life at a societal level that can lead to new findings, programs, movements, and inventions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg, 1999).

Dispositional Factors Associated with Creative Persons:

There have been a number of traits that have been associated with creative individuals in general, yet there are many different opinions as what these traits might be and how they are activated in real-life situations. Some of these traits, viewed as positive characteristics, are being curious, open-minded, energetic, artistic, and having a keen sense of humour. Other dispositional factors that challenge teachers' tolerance levels such as questioning rules, disorganization, absentmindedness, and a tendency to be emotional often are not valued in school settings (Davis, 1992).

As a subset of creativity, artistic creativity has been defined as a range of multi-dimensional processes that includes knowledge of art concepts and traditions in a culture, highly developed visual thinking skills, and intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1983). In addition, James (1999-2000) defined artistic creativity as a series of "decisions and actions that are both purposeful and not predictable

... It is an individual and a social process during which materials, forms, and cultural conventions are fused with the artist's personal history and emotions. Something is created that has never before existed in exactly that form" (p. 115). Dispositional factors also have been found that differentiate creative art students from those who are less creative. Those considered less creative produce drawings that are realistic without much inventiveness, whereas more creative students find problems and attempt to solve them by producing novel solutions (Getzels & Csikszentmihalyi, 1976). Problem-finding and problem-solving, being emotionally involved, and focusing on personal visions were identified by Dudek and Cote (1994) as relevant to creative students' successful engagement when making art projects. In a study about art students at the college level, Stalker (1981) found cognitive complexity (manifesting many solutions to problems), executive drawing abilities (superior skills in drawing), and affective intensity (strength of emotional responses and judgments) as skills and dispositions that define creative visual arts ability. Other individual creative characteristics, cited by Pariser (1997), include intensity of application and early mastery of cultural forms, production of a large volume of works over a sustained period of time, nurturance from family and teachers, and thematically specialized work.

Feist (1999) conducted an extensive longitudinal literature review to determine whether personality has an influence on creative achievement in art and science. He found that personality meaningfully co-varies with artistic and scientific creativity. Both creative artists and scientists tended to be more open to new

experiences, self-confident, self-accepting, driven, ambitious, hostile, impulsive, and less conventional and conscientious than others in the general population. Artists, however, were found to be more affective, emotionally unstable, as well as less social and accepting of group norms than were scientists who were found to be more conscientious. It also was determined that traits that distinguish creative children and adolescents tend to be ones that also distinguish creative adults. Traits associated with adult creativity, therefore, might be ones that are relevant for identifying, creating curricula, and assessing products produced by creative art students.

Creative adult traits described by Gardner (1999) are tendencies to have high energy, be extremely demanding and self-promoting, deprecate others, possess child-like traits, ignore convention, and fascination with their own childhood experiences. He characterized five kinds of creative activity: (1) solving a well-defined problem; (2) devising an all-encompassing theory; (3) generating work that is distant in time from when it was produced to a time when it is evaluated;

(4) performing a ritualized work; and (5) performing a series of actions that bring about some kind of political or social change. Category numbers 3 and 4 are concerned directly, according to Gardner, with artistic creativity.

Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) and Stokes (2001) challenged the notion that successful problem-finding and problem-solving are always a means for producing a body of work that can be considered creative. Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976) studied young college art students and the relationship between their problem-finding behaviours and the originality of their artworks. They concluded that the students' methods of discovery, visualization techniques, and ways they sought productive questions were often far better indicators of creative abilities than were their solutions to art problems. Stokes (2001) maintained that many creative individuals, Monet as an example, rather than adopting problem-finding strategies imposed restrictive task limitations on his own work, such as the constraining motifs he employed, with outcomes being high levels of variability.

Cultural Variability and Expression of Creativity:

According to Sternberg and Lubart (1999), "Cross-cultural comparisons have demonstrated cultural variability in the expression of creativity. In cultures that are traditional, it may take time to achieve new ways of thinking;" moreover, they have shown "cultures differ simply in the amount they value creative enterprise" (p. 9). Culture is learned and passed on from one generation to the next and cultures are dynamic and changing (Lubart, (1999), although the rate of change may differ from one context to the next. Children and adults alike only can be recognized as creative in areas that are valued within their own cultures (Feldman & Goldsmith, 1986; Gallagher, 1985; Greenlaw & McIntosh, 1988; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Zimmerman, 2005). In contemporary, industrialized societies, change and creativity are encouraged with emphasis on producing a product that is both novel and appropriate within a particular cultural context. Cognitive problem-finding and problem-solving initiatives are strategies that fit a product-oriented conception of creativity that has as an emphasis individuality, a strong work ethic, and belief that progress is always for the betterment of society. Creativity from this viewpoint, according to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), is more likely to occur in settings where new ideas take less time to enact and be accepted. In industrialized societies today, the notion of cultural and artistic creativity involves new ways of thinking, new art forms, new designs, and new concepts that focus on groups of individuals who play roles as interdependent members of a creative class (Florida, 2002).

In some cultures, collaboration, cooperation, conformity, and traditions may be valued more than completely novel solutions to problems. Such views about creativity, as contrasted to product-oriented ones, often are focused less on final products than on creative processes (Lubart, 1999). In China, for example, technical skill in art is viewed as fundamental for development of art ability and expression (Gardner, 1989). Most Chinese art teachers stress developing skills that are necessary before students are encouraged to

demonstrate creativity. Peat (2000) suggested that renewing and revitalizing something that already exists should also be viewed as creative. In traditional societies, creativity also should be viewed as dynamic and changing. In these societies, focus often is not on novelty alone, rather, creative acts may be seen as acts of transformation that arise out of respect for a particular art form. Both industrialized and traditional societies adapt styles from the past and employ them in contemporary contexts. For example, traditional Navajo weavers have changed both the kinds of materials used and the content of their weaving in response to local and world events. In respect to intercultural and global perspectives, contemporary notions about creativity and art talent development in a variety of contexts needs to be reconsidered to acknowledge a more inclusive paradigm than the pervasive notion of creative acts only as generation of original ideas and products made by a few individuals who change cultural domains.

Educational Interventions That Help Foster Creativity:

It has been suggested that creativity can be enhanced and teaching strategies can be developed to stimulate creativity. If it is accepted that creativity becomes increasingly specialized within a particular domain such as art (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Feldman, 1982; Gardner, 1999), teaching for creativity could focus on general creativity processes when students are young and then domain-specific activities can be introduced as students mature and commit themselves to a particular field of interest that involves real-world adult activities.

Problem-finding, problem-solving, divergent and convergent thinking, self-expression, and adaptability in new situations are all traits commonly associated with general creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Mumford, et al., 1994; Runco, 1993a, 1993b; Runco&Nemiro, 1993; Starko, 2001; Sternberg 1988, 1997, 1999). There is research that demonstrates that problem-finding and problem-solving skills can be taught and students' abilities to be productive thinkers and creative problem-solvers can be nurtured (Treffinger, Sortore, & Cross, 1993; Hetland, et al., 2007). According to Feldhusen (1992) and Treffinger, et al. (1993), students can be taught to find problems, clarify problems, master productive thinking and creative problem-solving tasks, monitor their own learning activities, and seek and test alternative solutions to problems.

Some educators have suggested a number of strategies for developing curricula in different subjects that support creativity. Some of these suggestions include having students practice problem finding as well as problem solving techniques; use unfamiliar materials that elicit novel thinking and lead to new ideas; experience convergent (structured) tasks for skill building and open-ended, divergent (unstructured) tasks for self-expression; rely on both visual and verbal materials; be exposed to curricula with open-ended outcomes that allow for unforeseen results; follow their own interests and work in groups as well as independently; choose environments that support their talents and creativity; and encounter a wide range of tasks intended to encourage, reinforce, and enhance emerging talents (Clark & Zimmerman, 2001a, 2004; Feldhusen, 1995; Mumford et al, 1994; Runco, 1993; Runco&Nemiro 1993; Sternberg & Williams, 1996; Zimmerman, 1999, 2005, 2006).

Educators also might consider factors that hamper creativity and look at ways to avoid or ameliorate these obstacles. James (1999-2000) focused on students in an art class described as having blocks to creativity and found that these obstructions included: cultural blocks in which students were not willing or able to understand art concepts and processes or the meaning and worth of art in contemporary contexts; cognitive blocks manifested in having difficulty interpreting meanings and metaphors in artworks; personal blocks that resulted in discomfort with expressing their emotions in public and confronting ambiguity; social blocks about how their products would be viewed in public arenas; and instructional blocks about unclear teacher expectations for students' processes and products. She suggested that supportive climates be created where students can learn to recognize their blocks to creativity and find personal meaning. Such an environment would encourage risk-taking and instructors could focus on differentiating curricula to meet individual student needs and direct teaching of a repertoire of strategies for working creatively.

In a democratic society, all students should be educated to their highest possible achievement levels so their abilities are recognized and rewarded. Students who will later become practicing artists should be prepared to think creatively and develop appropriate skills and abilities in a rapidly changing world in which technological innovation and novel products and ideas are valued worldwide. Differentiated teaching and learning should be researched and developed for these students so their creative abilities are recognized and supported.

Peat (2000) suggested that artists need long apprenticeships to practice their crafts, but everyone can learn techniques to “disrupt persistent habits of thought and free us for new ways of thinking” (p. 24). That means that each art student has potential and “psychic energy ... to lead a creative life” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 344). By reconsidering research and practice in respect to creativity and visual art teaching and learning, art education can play a major role in our increasingly visually oriented world by helping all students use their creative skills and developing their imaginations.

Conclusion:

There are many ways to describe and categorize characteristics of creative visual arts students and no single set of characteristics has been developed to comprehensively describe such abilities, yet there are some common understandings among researchers from various fields about relationships between creativity and art development. Although the term ‘artistic creativity’ does not have an agreed upon meaning in art education literature, its usage in schools should be conceptualized and evidence of creativity or potential for creativity should be taken into consideration when conducting research and developing teaching strategies and qualitative educational assessments.

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