

Exploring Teaching Creativity and Creative Teaching: The First Step in an International Research Project

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"Creativity is the ability of all living beings to transform and solve problems to live."
(Mostar, May 25, 2006)

At the recent "Power of Drama Conference" in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, we asked conference participants to give us their definitions of creativity. The statement above was just one of the eight or so we received. None were in complete agreement, each representing different perspectives on creativity. In this paper, we take our first steps in a three year exploration of the nature of creativity and creative teaching, what this might mean for drama/theatre education, and, specifically, for teacher education. Included here are some emerging definitions of creativity, its role in education, and a brief look at how creativity is viewed in our three contexts: Norway; Ontario, Canada; and Arizona, USA.

Background

The concept of creativity in education has arisen all over the world particularly in the developed countries. There are two important reasons for this interest:

- In the industrial nations, where technological and manufacturing jobs are being outsourced to other countries, there is a need for a new generation of workers who are creative and innovative.
- There is a need to add to the growing body of knowledge about the relationship between creativity and student development and capacity to learn.

The concept of creativity in education is currently being stressed by European and global school assessment programs, since no country wants its educational system to be rated below average. In 2002 the USA Secretary of Education claimed that if American youngsters are to succeed in working in a "service-driven enterprise" instead of a "manufacturing-driven enterprise", they will need an education that develops imaginative, flexible, and tough-minded thinking. He stated that the arts powerfully nurture the ability to think in this manner (Fiske, 2002). Recent reports, however, suggest that U.S. schools have reduced arts programming to emphasize reading, writing, and mathematics for students with low test scores in these subjects (Dillon, 2006). The Arts Education Partnership (AEP) (www.aep-arts.org), on the other hand, maintains that the challenge to education must never be simply to raise test scores, but rather to raise citizens who are capable of active participation in the community; the arts can help in realizing a vision creating this kind of democracy (Stevensen, 2005, p. 5).

In England researchers have put creativity on the agenda as a central element in education (Craft, 2005; Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2001; Fisher & Williams, 2004; Wilson, 2005). A report by the British National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE) entitled, *All our Futures*, observed in 1999 that no education system can be world-class without valuing and integrating creativity in teaching and learning. This report launched the Creative Partnership research projects and research cooperation on the concept of creativity (www.creative-partnership.com).

Recognizing that creativity is a distinctive attribute of the human species, UNESCO committed to promoting the Arts in Education proclaiming that “Creativity is our hope”. UNESCO maintains that schools of the twenty-first century must be able to anticipate the needs of young people in times of family and societal changes by according a special place to the teaching of artistic values and subjects. UNESCO held a world conference on “Arts in Education” in March 2006 to foster creative aesthetic work and creative thinking in education in both developed and developing countries (www.unesco.org).

The literature suggests that developing creativity may be good for the economy, good for the individual, good for society, and good for education. Later, we will examine the emergence of this argument in the three countries represented by the authors.

The Concept of Creativity in Education: A Short History

The focus on creativity in education is by no means a recent innovation. According to Jeffrey and Craft (2001, p. 2), research on creativity from the 1950s to the present has developed around four basic themes: a) In the 1950s the focus was on the individual, on genius and giftedness, and on the personality of the person who creates; b) the focus in the 1960s concentrated on measurable outcomes and tests of creative ability related to cognition, c) then in the 1970s, the emphasis shifted to connecting creativity with imaginativeness and the need to stimulate creativity; and d) finally, during the 1980s, researchers looked toward environmental conditioning and social theory to understand the concept of creativity. Following this fourth line of reasoning, researchers began to focus more on the creativity of ordinary people within the education system. At the same time, the methodology for investigating creativity in education shifted from large-scale positivist studies aiming to measure creativity, to qualitative approaches researching creativity in practice.

Defining Creativity

Creativity is, like all brain-based functions, ethereal and elusive. It is difficult to define with definitions varying according to the researcher’s assumptions about the concept of creativity relating to the personal, the process, and the outcomes considered. In his book *Creativity – Theory, History, Practice*, Pope (2005) attempts to define the concept of creativity broadly: “Creativity is extra/ ordinary, original and fitting, full-filling, in(ter)ventive, co-operative, un/conscious, fe\leftrightarrowmale, re...creation” (p. 52). He is clearly not looking for ONE definition that captures it all, but is trying to unlock the concept of creativity by looking at it from many different angles. This could explain why Lucas (2001) is rather critical of the NACCCE report which defines creativity as “Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value.” Lucas reflects upon the difficulty of finding a definition that does not constrain the concept of creativity. He proposes the following definition:

Creativity is a state of mind in which all of our intelligences are working together. It involves seeing, thinking and innovating. Although it is often found in the creative arts, creativity can be demonstrated in any subject at school or in any aspect of life.

It is interesting that he defines creativity as a “state of mind” which makes possible for all our intelligences (or we might say competences) to work together implying that creativity is not an intelligence in its own. The notion that creativity can be found in all aspects of life, as Lucas claims, suggests that creativity can be used for good or evil. Not only artists but also criminals can be extremely creative people. This makes it necessary to include an ethical aspect when discussing creativity.

We know creativity when we see it, but the mental processes involved are difficult to describe, says Fisher (2004) who thinks that a good definition of creativity will help us to identify what it is we are talking about and why certain things are clearly creative and others are not (p. 7). Ironically he does not provide a definition himself, but he does outline a number of aspects of creativity, beginning with a focus on the evolutionary processes that underpin creativity. He states that the processes of creative evolution consist of *generation*, *variation*, and *originality*. To create is to generate something—to be productive in thought, word or deed. But generation is not enough. Variation and differentiation are needed. Creativity does not repeat itself; it always contains something original and new. Fisher also looks at degrees of originality, dividing them into three levels:

- *Individual*: being original in relation to one's previous thoughts, words or deeds, e.g. "I have not thought or done this before"
- *Social*: being original in relation to one's social group, community or organisation, e.g. "We have not thought or done this before"
- *Universal*: being original in terms of all previous known human experience, e.g. "No-one has thought or done this before". (p. 9)

He later lists the characteristics of creative people; they...

- are flexible,
- connect ideas,
- are unorthodox,
- show aesthetic taste,
- are curious and inquisitive,
- see similarities and differences, and
- question accepted ways of doing things (p. 13).

He also claims that many creative breakthroughs occur through intuitive insight, when a problem is intuitively seen in a new way or from a fresh viewpoint.

Creativity: A General or a Domain Competence

Throughout history there have been individuals who are very creative in a specific domain; therefore, researchers believe that a person can be very creative within one domain (e.g. music, painting, writing, science, mathematics, etc.), but not necessarily in another. As mentioned earlier, the study of creativity in the 1950s began with research into the creative genius. Researchers arguing for this point of view often used historical celebrities to demonstrate their point. Lucas (2001) is critical of this view of creativity maintaining that too often creativity is confused with confidence. To be creative in a particular area, an individual needs subject knowledge together with the confidence to understand how this knowledge can be used in various situations. That is why Lucas chooses to define creativity as a "state of mind" that requires the capacity to live with complexity and uncertainty and why he disapproves of the idea of creativity as an overarching intelligence, as Gardner seems to suggest in the book *Intelligences Reframed* (1999). *All our Futures* (NACCCE, 1999) seems to choose a middle ground stating that creativity is to a certain extent domain specific; a creative artist will not necessarily be a creative mathematician, and a creative pianist is very seldom a creative cellist (p. 37). Csikszentmihelyi, who has conducted longitudinal studies into the nature of creativity, believes that creative individuals are boundary crossers and see relationships between different things that none of the rest of us can see (as cited in Pink, 2005). Pink observes further that creativity and innovation are functions of the right hemisphere of the brain. Pink posits that there are six "senses" which will develop High

Concept—High Touch players in a new conceptual age: design, story, symphony (synthesis), empathy, play and meaning.

Perhaps Lucas (2001) has identified a key point in arguing that the NACCCE (1999) report confuses creativity with confidence. Indeed, the report goes on to say that some creative skills (e.g. problem solving strategies, self-organization or divergent thinking skills) are generic; once learned in one domain, they can be transferred to others. For this reason, it can be argued that once children have identified their creative strengths, they should be encouraged to analyse their creative strategies and approaches through meta-cognitive thinking. Joubert (2001, p. 22) introduced two caveats to this discussion. Citing Ireson et al (1999), she says that it is necessary to have a knowledge base in order to transfer skills learned in one domain to another domain, i.e., you cannot be creative on a violin if you have never seen or played one before. This looks very much similar to the discussion raised by Lucas to distinguish between creativity and confidence. Moreover, Joubert, referencing Sternberg (1996), says that if strategies learned in one domain are not applied flexibly to other domains, they could be more hindrance than help. These reflections appear to support Lucas' definition: creativity is general and a state of mind.

Creativity in Education

The following elements highlighted by Craft, Jeffrey, and Leibling (2001) provide a framework for looking at creativity. They see creativity as:

- operating in the economic and political field,
- acting as a possible vehicle for individual empowerment in institutions and organizations; and
- being used to develop effective learning. (p. 1)

We live in a world where success is closely related to the creative application of good ideas and where the application of creativity to knowledge is sought for further economic development especially in the industrialized countries. The challenge for schools and social institutions is to shift the focus of education onto the development of a population that is equipped for a world of challenge and change and capable of thinking and taking new initiatives, not merely repeating what past generations have done (Fisher, 2004, p. 11). Creativity is essential, then, if new ways are to be found for solving problems. At the same time, creative activity is capable of rewarding the individual on an emotional level as it offers the spontaneous pleasures of play, self-expression, and satisfaction.

Creative Teaching or Teaching Creativity

Despite the fact that educational documents make claims for creativity in education and give several reasons for implementing creative teaching and creative learning in schools, most schools retain too many features which are fundamentally uncreative (Lucas, 2001; Sæbø, 2003). Most current practice appears to reflect outmoded traditional practices emphasizing positivist views of learning driven by standardized testing. A wider understanding of knowledge taking into account several kinds of intelligences or competencies (Gardner, 1983) is gradually making space for creativity in education in schools which implement the concept of multiples intelligences.

The British NACCCE report (1999) distinguishes between *teaching creatively* and *teaching for creativity*. Teaching creatively occurs when teachers use imaginative approaches to make learning more interesting, exciting, and effective, while teaching for creativity takes place when forms of teaching intended to develop young people's own creative thinking and

behaviour are used (p. 89). Creative teaching is regarded as a key component in all good teaching, but it does not guarantee that the children are developing their own creative potential nor does it guarantee that a teacher's own creativity is applied with clear ethical guidance; creative teachers may, in fact, diminish the creativity of others around them, or possibly do great harm, either to students or to other teachers (Craft, 2005, p.131).

Teaching Creativity

To develop the creative abilities of the students, the NACCCE (1999) report sets up three main principles for the teachers to address:

- *encouraging* students to believe in their creative potential, engage their sense of possibility, and give them the confidence to try;
- *identifying* students own creative strengths in different areas; and
- *fostering* the creative potential of all children and by realising that the best way to enhance creativity is through the process of being creative.

It is necessary to add a fourth principle, says Craft (2005), which is to adopt a learner-inclusive approach to pedagogy, in which the students can co-participate or co-create with each other or their teachers (p. 45).

Lucas (2001) is critical of the assumption that creativity cannot be learned (p.38). He outlines four key conditions for teaching creativity and creative learning relevant in the school context:

1. *The need to be challenged* – both by having goals set for us and by being helped to set our own – in a supporting and demanding atmosphere.
2. *The elimination of negative stress*. If the brain is over-stressed, it ceases to operate at a higher level and our most primitive survival instincts take over and dominate.
3. *Feedback*. We need skilled feedback to learn to distinguish what is quite good from what is stunningly brilliant and which approaches work better than others and to develop reflective internal feedback strategies.
4. *The capacity to live with uncertainty*. Teachers who are seeking to encourage creativity cannot expect to have all the answers, but they can offer robust and workable alternative structures and processes to their pupils, which can be developed and personalized. (p.39)

Beyond this, Lucas claims that, while creative teachers are interested in knowledge, they are more interested in skills and even more interested in attitudes and values. As it happens, these same outcomes—*knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values*—stand at the heart of a wide concept of knowledge which has recently been announced as the basis for the Norwegian revised compulsory curriculum for primary and secondary education, grades 1 – 13 (Djupedal, 2005).

How to Foster Creativity in Schools

In order to actualize creativity in school, Lucas (2001) argues that two areas need to be developed a) Teacher's pedagogy especially their understanding of how we learn to learn, and b) more structured intervention by creative mentors and teachers.

Teaching the students how to learn effectively should be the essential kernel in every teacher's pedagogy, says Lucas; the teacher needs, above all, to have respect for the individual learner. Lucas lists some of the ways in which respect for an individual's creativity can be encouraged while still adhering to structure and the need to assess achievement. Among these are the following:

- Respecting each student and encouraging social rather than private learning.

- Encouraging active not passive learning and individual interests rather than standardized curriculum.
- Recognizing multiple intelligences and engaging many learning styles.
- Encouraging and exploring emotional responses.
- Posing open-ended questions and offering many patterns rather than a standardized model. (p.40).

Fisher (2004) offers a list of four points to check whether a lesson has stimulated the students' creative thinking. Are students...

- applying their own imagination?
- generating their own questions, hypothesis, ideas, and outcomes?
- developing skills or techniques through creative activity?
- using judgement to assess their own or others creative work? (p. 2)

Fisher states that, if we want to transform education to foster creativity, it is necessary to build creative capacity both in students and in teachers as individual learners. The most important keys to individual creativity are:

- *Motivation* – which is the key to creativity. The things we want to do, we feel passionate about; they engage us and are fed by internal encouragement.
- *Inspiration* – which means being inspired by oneself or by others, getting fresh input and lots of knowledge and stimulating curiosity by being more observant and asking more questions.
- *Gestation* – that is allowing time for creative ideas to emerge. We need time to think things through on conscious and unconscious levels. Creative insights often result from processes that are unconscious and lie below the level of awareness.
- *Collaboration* – because we normally are more creative when we have others to support us. The learning environment in school needs to open up for ideas to be created, examined, shared and tried out, and for this we need creative partners. (pp. 14 – 18)

A study in ten European countries, *Creative Learning and Students Perspectives* (Jeffrey, 2005, p. 62-68), identified some dominant themes from the students' perspective: The students

- were given some knowledge as a foundation before being asked to do anything with it, but then were able to use their own ideas as they learned;
- were intellectually challenged and stretched and saw the learning as fun;
- found the boundaries between discipline and behaviour;
- worked in relationship with others; and
- were inspired by the teacher's love for the subject and wanted to please the teacher.

When teachers promoted creative learning they

- had genuine enjoyment of the subject and/or of teaching;
- provided opportunities for learners to take risks and were willing to take risks themselves and sometimes take on a learner role;
- drew on students' interests anticipating that students would do something different with their knowledge and skills;
- aimed to "capture the imagination" and use children's imaginations; and
- saw creativity as "an enabler", "to enhance learning" and to "raise motivation and, therefore, achievement". (Jeffrey, 2005)

Some Dilemmas and Tensions

As an emphasis on creativity is becoming a part of the universalised discourse in the Western world and reflects the globalization of competitive economic activity, one has to ask if this is necessarily a good development. This increased competition is cited as one important reason for implementing creativity in education. Even if we all tend to agree with Maslow (1970), that the creative individual is a fulfilled one, we need to be aware of the hidden agendas that may be the main reason for the emphasizing of creativity in education. Such questionable reasons, for example, could include the promotion of liberal individualism and the “throw-away society” (Craft, 2005, p. 117).

Stimulating creativity involves encouraging learners to adopt a way of life that presents itself as universal, but researchers have demonstrated that creativity is culturally specific, i.e., students have different cultural and creative capital depending on ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender (Craft, Jeffrey, & Leibling, 2001). Of course we could follow Craft’s argument (2005) and concede that the increasing global influence of Western culture, including its markets, means that the relevance of creativity as a universal concept may grow. If we accept this perspective, our role as educators would be to support the universalised approach to creativity, nurturing, and nourishing a homogenised approach which gradually erases cultural, political, socio-economic, and gender differences (p. 100).

Other dilemmas arise from the relationship linking knowledge, the curriculum, and creativity. If teachers do not implement creative strategies in their teaching, they prevent students from developing creative strategies in their own learning process. Also, if a teacher has insufficient knowledge in a domain, it is difficult for her to be creative or to help the students to deepen their knowledge through creative activities. The importance of collaboration in fostering creativity may be a dilemma in a school which is dominated by linear instruction and individual work. Sawyer (2004) believes that a better understanding of creativity as a dialogic and collaborative process is needed; it is possible that we could learn more as teachers from actors. This approach would include using role play, verbal spontaneity, and staying in the “moment”, and working in a more improvised way. The challenge for the teacher is to manage a balance between the goals that one has for a group of learners and a method for enabling real conversation to take place. As drama educators, the authors of this paper are interested in the possibilities for drama and theatre to deal with some of these challenges, since drama in education can integrate creative strategies and dialogic collaborative processes into the teaching process. This exploration will be the subject of future research.

Creativity in Educational Documents

Depending on how a country, province or state organises the curriculum or content standards, the concept of creativity may receive greater or lesser prominence. As a start we will look briefly at curricula from Norway, Ontario, Canada, and in Arizona, USA to determine how creativity is employed in the drama/theatre curriculum.

Creativity in Norwegian Educational Documents

The Knowledge Lift a new, mandatory curriculum for grades 1 – 13 (UFD, 2005), will be introduced in all schools across Norway in the autumn of 2006. This includes the former national Core Curriculum (KUF, 1994), based on a broad concept of knowledge that is articulated in the chapter of the creative human being. To develop new knowledge and foster the learners’ creativity, education is to be constructed on three traditions that very often interrelate:

- practical work and learning through experience, including reflection and discussion about tacit knowledge and skills
- theoretical thinking, tested by logic and facts, experience, evidence and research
- cultural traditions, mediated by body and mind, embedded in arts and crafts, in language and literature, in theatre, song, music, dance and athletics. This tradition unites empathic ability and expressive force. (pp. 12-13)

A demand for variety in methods and learning strategies is made in *Culture for Learning* (UFD, 2004) and further concretized in *Principles of Education* (KD, 2006). Here it is stated that the students are to encounter art and cultural expression that stimulate their creativity and innovative abilities. They are to be given opportunities to use their creative abilities through different activities and forms of expressions (s. 2, authors' translation). *Creative talent* is defined as "the ability to find new solutions to practical problems by untried moves and unused methods, by identifying new relationships through thinking and experimenting, by developing new standards for evaluation and collaboration, or by originating novel forms of artistic expression" (KUF, 1994, p. 11).

Some of the concepts that appear to be closely related to creativity are risk taking, meeting the unknown, encountering the new, being open minded, engaging in fantasy and imagination, discovering, innovating and confronting the new. Education is clearly presented as requiring explorative, student-engaging, creative teaching.

Creativity in Educational Documents in the Province of Ontario, Canada

The importance of fostering creativity through the arts in Ontario schools was highlighted recently in a statement by the Hon. Caroline Di Cocco (Minister of Culture).

Innovation and creative thinking is what we want to teach our young people in the 21st century. We want to provide them with the kind of education that engages them, inspires them and teaches them to think for themselves. A focus on creativity through the arts will ensure our children get the well-rounded education they need to succeed in our complex and rapidly changing world. (Di Cocco, 2006, May 8)

A preliminary analysis of guidelines for elementary and secondary school programs (Ontario, 1998, 1999, 2000) indicates that, creativity is an important concept. Learning expectations have been organized in categories that include "Creative Work" at the elementary level (Ontario, 1998) and "Creation" at the secondary level (Ontario 1999, 2000). The term "Creative Work" is used to refer to various aspects of devising works of art and communicating to an audience while "Creation" appears as one of three major strands. The section on Dramatic Arts explains the meaning of Creation.

Creative work consists of constructing and performing drama. Through a variety of dramatic forms, students explore characters and issues drawn from a text or from their own ideas. The process encourages questioning, interpreting, and shaping meaning. Each student has the opportunity to experience being performer, audience, playwright, technician, designer, and critic. (Ontario 1999, p. 22)

In addition to devising and communicating, other concepts associated with creativity include, risk taking, problem solving, resourcefulness, originality, meaning making, interpretation, understanding as well as applying techniques and theories, understanding the roles of various specialists in the field of theatre, collaborating, and making appropriate use of theatre forms and technology.

Creativity in Educational Documents in Arizona, United States of America

As education in the United States is viewed as a state responsibility, there is no national curriculum; however, the U.S. government can influence education through federal policies and mandates, usually unfunded, and through federal grants for specific programs. The Bush Administration's education policy, the No Child Left Behind Act, is significant because, for the first time, the arts are recognized as core academic subjects.

In Arizona, standards in arts education were adopted in 1997 and are currently in revision retaining the basic format of the original and an emphasis on theatrical production. In the proposed draft, there are three broad standards—Create, Relate, Evaluate. Currently there is no definition of what it means to “create”, “relate” or “evaluate”; the definitions are implied within the standard. There are five strands within each standard: Collaboration, Acting, Technical Theatre/Design, Directing, and Playwriting.

Creativity as reflected in both the 1997 Arts Standards and in the Workplace Standards appears to be aimed toward *creative thought in the workplace*. The rationale for arts education state, for example, that students will benefit by

- developing attributes of self-discipline and personal responsibility, reinforcing the joy of learning and self-esteem, and fostering the thinking skills and *creativity valued in the workplace* (emphasis added, Arizona Department of Education, 1997)

It is telling that the only the Workplace Standards directly refer to “creative thinking and the creative process”:

Workplace Standard 3: Students apply critical and creative thinking skills to make decisions and solve workplace problems. (Arizona Department of Education, 1997)

There is, however, no explanation of what “creative thinking skills” are.

The final format of the arts standards along with how teachers choose to implement the standards and what will be the results for students especially in relationship to the development of creativity remains to be seen and will be the subject of future research.

Summary

This paper represents the first step in what is planned to be a three-year journey into explorations about creativity and teaching creatively in drama/theatre classrooms internationally. The following actions are planned as part of this project:

- Completion of an extensive literature review.
- Development of a questionnaire to gain the perspective of classroom teachers. The questionnaire instrument is planned to be flexible enough to be administered in a variety of locations internationally.
- Each participant in this research project also plans a localized case study of the practice of creativity and creative teaching in her/his area (Norway; Ontario, Canada; and Arizona, USA).
- Additional partners from Africa and Latin America are being sought to move the nature of this study to new cultural contexts.

As a word, *creativity* not only means many different things to different people, but it is also a term that is potentially politically charged. Whatever the definition and whatever the uses of the term, there is no doubt that creativity has enormous currency among political leaders and educators alike. It is hoped that the current study will produce some insight that may inform the decisions of both.

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