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Creativity in Schools

Creativity is experiencing a global revolution. Since the 1990s, in many countries, it has assumed increasing importance in the school curriculum, contrasting strongly with previous approaches to creativity in education. But whilst the tide of opportunities rises, there are questions to ask. What is 'creative learning'? How does it relate to 'creative teaching'? How do we organise the curriculum to nurture creativity? What pedagogical strategies support it? How is creative learning different to effective learning? And, more fundamentally, what dilemmas and tensions are raised for the curriculum by these models of creativity? What responsibilities do teachers and schools have for stimulating creativity with reference to the social and ethical framework, and the wider environment?

This book looks hard at these and other questions. Part One uses a number of lenses associated with the school to discuss creativity and learning, the development of a creativity language, curriculum and pedagogy. Part Two takes a broader view, which encompasses *principles*. It explores creativity with reference to cultural specificity, environmental degradation and the destructive potential of creativity. Finally, in Part Three, the implications of tensions and dilemmas in terms of pedagogy and principle are explored.

For teachers and schools who work with pupils who are pre-school age, through to those in post-compulsory education, this book synthesises practice, policy and research in order to critique some current assumptions, to lay out an agenda for further development, and suggests practical ways of taking forward pupils' creative development, celebrating their unique generativity in a more thoughtful way.

Anna Craft is Senior Lecturer in Education at The Open University, Director of The Open Creativity Centre.

'Anna Craft combines a thorough mastery of the literature on creativity with a far-reaching reconceptualization of standard aspects of teaching as seen through the lens of creativity. She does not spurn controversy. Whether or not one agrees with particular points, everyone will learn from this book.'
Professor Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Education and Cognition, Harvard Graduate School of Education, USA.

'Creativity is being widely recognized as "good thing" in education. But good practice needs clear thinking and here, as always, Anna Craft provides plenty of it for teachers and policy makers alike.'
Sir Ken Robinson, The Getty Foundation, Los Angeles, USA.

'Finally, a book for teachers that recognises that creativity is complicated. Anna Craft dares to question some of the soft platitudes in which the wheels of liberal education have become stuck.'
Professor Guy Claxton, University of Bristol Graduate School of Education, England.

'In 'Creativity in Schools' Anna Craft has produced a coherent, deep, wise, scholarly and yet fully practical book that will, without doubt, be of immense value to the field of creativity studies as well as to those in education who hope to make schools and classrooms more creative places.'
David Feldman, Professor of Developmental Psychology, Tufts University, USA.

'The reflective reader will find much food for thought in this refreshing, provocative and stimulating book.'
Ng Aik Kwang, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

'Anna Craft herself has taken a creative risk – exposing and questioning the contradictions found throughout the creativity debate. It is a risk which succeeds. Whatever your perspective on creativity and Learning, this book will inform, challenge and inspire.'
Joe Hallgarten, Learning Director, Creative Partnerships, The Arts Council, England.

For

Hugo and Ella

in hope that creativity and wisdom will guide you,
your peers
and those that come after you;

and

for Simon

with love, thanks and appreciation
for co-creating the story.

Preface

Creativity is an important element of the zeitgeist in the early twenty-first century, world wide. It is described as a significant part of the education process by politicians and other policy makers, educators and researchers. This perhaps ineffably human characteristic is one that has long fascinated many commentators, and it has had my attention for the past 10 years. It has, almost universally, a positive press. Many have explored how it can best be promoted in education.

Is it, though, as simple as that? What does the positive perspective mask? What kinds of tensions and dilemmas face us as educators as we promote the creativity of pupils?

This book aims to unpick some significant tensions and dilemmas that accompany the adoption of creativity as a prominent part of learning in schools. It takes a hard look at how possible it is to foster learner creativity and asks some fundamentally challenging questions, including how appropriate it may be to do so. Although the book ultimately has an optimistic outlook, proposing that to foster creativity is an important element of an education that encourages critical scrutiny, different perspectives and new ways of thinking, it treads some difficult terrain on the way, attempting to make visible some of the bars on our worldview 'cage', as Tim Smit describes it in his Foreword.

The evolution of this book has benefited enormously from conversations with fellow academics, as well as teachers, pupils and policy makers, mainly in England where my work at The Open University and as a freelance consultant brings with it regular and fascinating opportunities to explore creativity in education. The book has also benefited from conversations with researchers and teachers in the United States, where I have been fortunate to be a (mainly remote) visiting scholar at Harvard University for a two-year period. It has also benefited from the inspiration and support of my partner Simon and our two children, Hugo and Ella, aged six and four respectively. During several spells abroad with the children in the last 2 years, I have been particularly struck by the ways in which these two particular children have made sense of and engaged with the generative thinking that we might describe as facilitating creativity in many domains of knowledge in the

worlds around them. Their experience of entering a new culture for a few days or weeks at a time has been a reminder of the ways in which we perhaps take for granted the cultural mores and values that provide a context to any learning, in or beyond the classroom. For, as Tim Smit indicates in his Foreword, everything that we do is situated and relational to values and beliefs. Fostering deep engagement with the values contexts to creativity forms a significant challenge for any parent or teacher.

This book raises some fundamental questions about mistaken assumptions we might make about stimulating creativity in education, and it uncovers numerous tensions and dilemmas. It is my hope that the book will both offer and stimulate some possible ways in which we might respond to these, and that it may set out a range of ongoing questions for scholars, educators and policy makers to continue to develop and to research.

Anna Craft
The Open University, January 2005

Acknowledgements

This book has benefited from many conversations with colleagues in schools, universities and policy bodies, in England and also in the United States. In particular, I would like to thank Bob Jeffrey and my many colleagues at The Open University, and also Howard Gardner and colleagues at Harvard University's Project Zero. The inspiration to write the book at all came in part from the direction into human creativity that Howard's work in particular took in the late 1990s. Thanks are due also to Penelope Best, Pam Burnard, Dawn Burns, Kerry Chappell, Pat Cochrane, Bernadette Duffy, Joe Hallgarten, Genie Gabel-Dunk and the Pupil Researchers at Monson Primary School, Teresa Grainger, Lois Hetland, Margaret Leese, Jean Keane, Lindsey Haynes and the Reception Class at Cunningham Hill Infants, Mara Krechevsky, Debbie Lee-Keenan, Ben Mardell, David Martin, Steve Seidel, Margaret Talboys, Katy Adje, Becky Swain, Bel Reid, and also Graham Jeffery and his colleagues at Newham Sixth-Form College in East London, Professor Christopher Bannerman and his colleagues at ResCen, Middlesex University, and Professor Peter Woods, formerly of The Open University. The inspirational work of Tim Smit and his collaborators at the Eden Project has given me hope that our imaginations can, collectively, be put to sound ecological and spiritual use in a world moving fast in other directions. I regard it as a real honour that Tim agreed to write the Foreword to the book. In addition, many other creative practitioners from within and beyond education have inspired and engaged me in thinking about the issues in this book; I hope they will forgive my not naming every one.

Thanks are also due to the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, Creative Partnerships Black Country, Creative Partnerships Hub, The Open University, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Fulbright Commission and Arts Council England, for awarding funding grants which, whilst focused on specific areas of study, also afforded opportunities to explore many of the issues explored in the book.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my family: my two patient children, Hugo and Ella, and my partner Simon, who encouraged my efforts despite the many family times forfeited in the final months and weeks of this book's gestation. Six-year-old Hugo's advice: 'think hard and be careful, but try your best' was invaluable; four-year-old Ella's drawings and notes to help me with my writing were a real tonic, as were the special times when the children joined me in my study with their own writing projects, complete with pencils, paper, toy laptop and their overflowing imaginations. My partner Simon's depth of thinking and commitment to a simplifying lifestyle, his own creative writing and some of his library, informed thinking in the later parts of the book.

Meanwhile, Angela Killick-Harris, Carole Munro and Keeley Elliott helped keep the household sane and functioning. Gill Bathurst provided inspirational respites through much-loved piano lessons next door, and Tora Wilkinson reminded me that walking through beautiful landcapes, dancing and making space for our children's 'best-friend' times are also important in a crowded life. David and Janette Stanley offered a place of refuge for us all when we needed it, and Naomi Craft and Saul Hyman, with their children Natasha and Isaac, helped put it all in perspective. My thanks are due finally to Maurice and Alma Craft, who in their different ways offered invaluable advice on the manuscript. It was through discussions with Maurice Craft in particular that I first became aware of the possibility of analysing the limitations, tensions and dilemmas inherent in promoting creativity in education. His gentle but regular prompting persuaded me to finish the manuscript.

Certainly, without all of these people's generosity of time and thought this book would not have been written. I hope each may be able to find aspects of themselves in it.

Anna Craft
The Open University, January 2005

Foreword

Don't come strutting in here Johnny Confident

Name a moment that has changed your perception of life. Romantically, one can name lots of them; but epiphanies, 'road to Damascus' moments, are very rare. When I was in the music industry I spent a short while making records with supermodels – their celebrity being thought (wrongly) a good guide to pop music success. I learned two things. First, supermodels are normally lonely, because most men are too frightened to ask them out. Second, when you gaze upon such physical perfection you soon get bored: there is such symmetry in the face that there is nothing to grab your interest. Picture-postcard topography of something ideal is bland.

Flaws create mystery, mystery creates fascination and fascination, in turn, leads to a desire to understand. Therein lies an important secret that all great musicians, artists and writers instinctively explore or exploit.

Name another moment. A friend asked me to give him 1 hour. He marked out 1 square metre of a field at the Lost Gardens of Heligan. Sit and look at this patch of grass for 1 hour, he said. I did. Life would never be the same again. As your eyes adjust to the micro-weave of the grass, you first notice the stems are all individual, scarred in different places and dead fibres randomly askew. A spider, ants, more spiders, different ants, beetles, insects of all shapes and sizes that I'd never knowingly encountered before. The noise of the birds – why didn't I hear them like that before? But... behind the birdsong, like a rumour of something distant, the murmur of the grass. What was once a field that I walked across on the way to something else was now a complete world of which I had been totally unaware. I could see literally hundreds of living things: some working in concert, like the ants; some doing their own thing. They were inextricably linked. This is ecology, I thought. Then, as I watched, I wondered whether I just wanted it to be linked, for each creature to relate to the next. Was this Celtic romance, 'a butterfly sneezes and it has an impact on the other side of the world' sort of thing?

At The Eden Project[1] we regularly have a beer in the local pub after work. What is Eden? I ask some of the new kids working with us for the summer holidays. Close your eyes, I say, and we play a strange version of Kim's Game (pelmanism). That beer in front of you. Where do the bubbles form? What colour is it? What jewellery is the person next to you wearing? What is on the table? Aghast, most realise they don't know, or they think they know but are wrong. All, that is, except the quiet girl who shyly nods in conversation, never volunteering anything save in answer to a direct question. She saw everything. She told me the colour of everyone's eyes and clothes, and even the perfume they were wearing. 'Life's so fast today,' they say. 'Oh, is it?' I reply. Maybe that's because they're skating over it, seeing nothing, understanding nothing. A series of undigested images and appetites. Maybe that's why most works of art choose as their focus the pain of isolation or, indeed, love. It is the pain that puts the brakes on this skating and makes you look at your emotional square metre of grass.

Emotional intelligence has its own creativity, its complex coping mechanisms and its surge for growth. It has been observed that, in many cases of autism, one finds abilities of extreme photographic memory and information assimilation married to emotional dysfunction. Does the search for the creative impulse lie here somewhere in the link between emotional development and the power of observation? Every good teacher is a catalyst to creativity, a liberator. Every bad teacher creates cages. Humans are superb escapologists when they can see and understand from what they are trying to escape. The impossible jail to escape from is the one where you cannot see the bars. That is why it is a great pleasure to have been asked to write the Foreword to Anna Craft's hugely important book. It is about creativity, but also about the chains that bind us all, and it does something hugely valuable. It describes what the bars might look like and the sloppy ideas to which we have signed up to too readily, and proposes some possible escape routes.

Creativity is a word that comes with baggage. In some circles it hints at genius, in others to dodgy accounting practices. Being creative is either praise or an inference of a character flaw. However it is used, the implication is that some kind of cleverness is involved, evidenced by some talent for conjuring out of nothing or problem solving. Most of us are suspicious of it being the Devil's work unless it is done in the name of a greater good, in which case divine intervention bestows a cod sanctity to the practitioner. Latterly, as it has become part of the educator's armoury, it has taken on a whole new meaning. It is something we all have, if only we could draw it out of ourselves. It is the defining element of the Ego, the essence of us, the self. We're all creative now, and this robs it of its exclusive sting. It is part of a

[1] The Mission Statement of The Eden Project, based in Cornwall, in the far south-west of England, is: 'To promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources leading to a sustainable future for all.' It is the vision of Tim Smit and the project's co-founders.

universal quest for selfness, or so some would have us believe, but lurking in the undergrowth the snake of avarice is hissing, is sleething through the new world of intellectual property, ideas made real, consumer products that either are an end result of creativity, or will help you on the creative journey. Its close friend is Innovation, that other semantic impostor. New is good, but new that turns into something you can replicate for money is even better! I'm not a cynic, so I don't actually believe what I have just said – totally – but, in the Western World, creativity as an idea is horribly muddled with consumption, either in the thrill of the stimulation of the new for its own sake, or in the prospect that it represents a currency, soft at its source but as hard and cold as money when it enters the ocean in the big wide world.

Stand-alone creativity, unrooted in either experience or culture, is chaos. C. S. Lewis once said 'While science may lead you towards truth only the imagination can lead you to meaning.' Meaning is what we all seek in some shape or form, from understanding relationships between one another, or from a desire to be 'at one with the world'. In common with many of my generation, I haven't the comfort of religion, but a thread that runs through most of us is a desire for some kind of spiritual experience that gives us a sense of belonging or community in the widest sense of the word. I would argue that those who are most at one with the world have the least elemental drive to be creative in the sense of exploring the boundaries of the possible in a search for a language that reveals some 'truth' to them. It is rare to hear music or see works of art that are 'edgy' that are the creation of the contented. It is almost as if a necessary condition for masterworks is a rage within, a dysfunction of the soul, you might say. My youngest son once said in jest that he wished I'd been an abusive father so that he could be a credibly creative musician. All of us know that, by and large, this is a stereotype that doesn't bear very close inspection, but that there is a grain of truth in it. This is evidenced in part in our culture by awarding artists more latitude in behaviour than we would allow others. There is a wonderful irony that we will celebrate artists to whom we wouldn't give houseroom on a personal level.

It is in this notion of the artist as being somehow an outsider that gives the lie to creativity being a universal attribute. There appears to be an unconscious litmus test that distinguishes between 'showing off', craftsmanship and artistry. Of course, the distinctions are blurred. In my experience creativity is sparked by several influences. Take as a given, for a moment, that one has the technical ability to execute a particular piece of work or thinking. In the marketing world there is a famous phrase: 'Please give me the freedom of a tight brief' (a framework in which to create). Often, all it takes to liberate people is a sharply defined territory on which to focus their intellectual juices and away they go. The most disastrous technique is to say 'think of something', which often has the effect of producing despondency and inertia.

A friend of mine in São Paulo, Ricardo Semler (famous for his management books describing the revolutionary techniques used at his factories), has set up an educational trust. Children come to the school and they are watched as they play and explore their territory. One child, for instance, showed no interest in anything until he had lifted a stone and found a woodlouse underneath it. He was encouraged to draw it and, using this as a starting point, was encouraged to observe it ever more closely, which, as any good teacher knows, led him into writing about it, working out the mathematics of its carapace and studying its living habits. Before long he was fully assimilated into a recognizable 'curriculum', but one of his making.

Ricardo is inspirational because he takes a huge amount of time working up the right question. This is a technique I have borrowed from him, and it has changed my whole approach to developing ideas. He begins with the question 'What does great look like?' Time after time he exposes the fact that many of our actions or inventions are a response to a situation that we have accepted without ever going back to first principles. To give you a trivial example by way of illustration, I asked for the best waste management system possible for our restaurants at Eden, and I got it. Unfortunately, I had not asked, or framed the proposition correctly. I should have asked for the best waste management system possible that not only separated and minimised waste, but which also encouraged visitors to clear their own tables and in so doing learned about the waste processes in a way that would influence their behaviour at home. I cannot count the times that I have been told things can't be done, which on closer inspection reveal that no-one has actually tried.

The most inspirational example of this that I know is William Strickland, the principal of the Manchester School in Pittsburgh, in the heart of the roughest area of one of the roughest cities in the USA. Bill was a homeless child who put his nose up to the window of the Pittsburgh Arts College and watched an old man turning a pot on a wheel. The man spotted him and invited him in. To cut a long story short, the man took Bill under his wing and he eventually went to university, whence he returned to Pittsburgh with the ambition of providing the opportunities he had had to other poor people. His mantra is: 'If it's good enough for rich folks, it's good enough for poor folks too'. His other saying is: 'Give people world class facilities and you will get world class behaviours'.

He drew inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture and searched out his best pupil, who he convinced to design a beautiful school bathed in natural light. His story of how he then persuaded people to donate money, so that today the Manchester School is one of the most famous in the USA, is remarkable. There is a fountain, there are works of art on all the walls, there is an art gallery as good as a national museum, except that it exhibits only the work of pupils; there is a concert hall paid for by some of the world's most famous musicians who have come there to play.

The refectory is full of hand-made furniture, and on open days all the parents come to share in the achievements of their children, something unthinkable when he began 15 years ago. What is the only constant in Bill Strickland's daily routine? Buying flowers. Every day he buys big bunches of flowers, which he places in the entrance hall and in the refectory. Why? Because if it's good enough for rich folks, it's good enough for poor folks too. In fifteen years there has been no vandalism, theft or violence at the school.

Talking to Bill, he tells you that his driving philosophy is that many of us have our creativity repressed as we get older. The crayons and paint are removed, and the things to bang and holler with are put in a box. He sees this as institutionalised arrested development. That is why all his pupils of whatever age are made to express themselves through art for their first year. They all choose to continue with it. He fundamentally believes that what is going on is 'self-expression' – finding a unique voice for each person. Once people have discovered their voices they can develop as human beings.

William Strickland is inspirational because he dared to put his beliefs into practice and has been vindicated by the results. He is also very fierce in drawing a distinction between self-expression and creativity. The former is as necessary as breathing; the latter, to him, is the interface between self-expression and the outside world. Language messes these distinctions up; I think there is something important in them, but what I'm not quite sure.

The battleground of creativity throws up much discussion about the appropriateness of defining creativity as if it were a universal attribute, recognised across cultures with the same weighting we give it. Like Anna Craft, I'm not convinced by this. Among Amerindian tribes the womenfolk are all accorded the status of 'creatives', in that they make and decorate most of the tradable artefacts which are exchanged for the essentials of the outside world, but the designs are dictated by tradition and symbolic meaning. To stray into self-expression outside their cultural framework would be thought of as madness. This attitude is common in many areas of the world. In fact, creativity that has broken the shackles of the culture whence it came appears to be a predominantly Western attribute. This, however, opens up the distinctions between creativity in problem solving (which is evident in all cultures of the world as they adapt to their environments and evolve new techniques to combat situations as they arise) and creativity in the arts (where we tend to interpret it to mean 'new' or previously unseen). It could be argued that creativity in the arts is in inverse relation to the power of the state or the atrophy within a culture. Most of the great artistic movements appear to coincide with either great social upheavals or realignments. This is as true for Pop Art in the 1960s as for the flowering of Chinese art in the Middle Ages.

The other major criticism of creativity as a universal attribute is that it has become associated with novelty and the 'throw-away' society, the

inference being that the constant quest for the new by definition makes the old redundant, or that the pressure of the new encourages the assumption of inbuilt obsolescence into all that is made. Unlike Anna Craft, this I refute, for it confuses the act of creation by the Maker with the values of society which, while linked, are not connected at the hip: the Maker is aligned to creativity but not necessarily vice versa. Without the Maker, creativity still exists.

So many of us feel cowed in the presence of those who presume to have taste and an eye for the arts, those who are creative. Damn your certainties, we feel, but they set the cultural agenda in the face of our inability to express ourselves fully. A recent MORI poll (2004) found that 79% of Britons wished they were more cultured. This is either hugely exciting or terribly depressing; I'm not sure which. Louis Armstrong was once asked what Jazz was. 'If you have to ask... shame on you,' was the curt reply.

As I come to the end of my personal ramble exploring the nature of creativity I know exactly what he means: creativity is embarrassingly hard to pin down, and yet it is something that everyone should feel actively engaged in, free of fear – for their own health.

Tim Smit
Co-founder and Chief Executive, The Eden Project
26 January 2005

Introduction

This book has arisen from an awareness that the burgeoning discourse in policy, practice and research that serves to support the development of creativity in schools brings with it numerous implications. Many of these are positive, and, in general, creativity in the early twenty-first century has indeed carried a positive value. In terms of education, it has also brought together thinking about 'creativity', 'creative teaching', 'teaching for creativity' and 'creative learning' in such a way as to make them often indistinguishable. One of the purposes behind this book is to clarify some of the terms. As a practitioner, researcher and parent passionately committed to fostering the creativity of learners in schools, I believe that this is a part of our work in ensuring that we do the best we can to nurture learners' creativity.

However, the book has other purposes too. It is concerned with untangling some of the tensions, dilemmas and even possible limitations to promoting creativity in education. For if creativity is to be promoted in education, then we might ask ourselves what might be some of the possible implications of doing so.

The discussion is divided into three main parts. Part I uses a number of lenses associated with the school, to discuss creativity and learning, the development of a creativity language, curriculum and pedagogy. Part II takes a broader view, which encompasses *principles*. It explores creativity with reference to cultural specificity, environmental degradation and the destructive potential of creativity. Finally, in Part III, the implications of tensions and dilemmas in terms of pedagogy and principle are explored, and some resolutions proposed. A Postscript then lays out a range of possible onward journeys for development of, and research into, creativity in schools.

In Chapter 1, then, our attention first turns to setting the context, discussing why and how creativity has come to be such an important aspect of life in the twenty-first century, and the implications for education policies and practices. Recent education initiatives in England are discussed and the research context briefly touched upon.