

Creating togetherness – moving towards a ‘we-paradigm’ in creativity research and practice

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Education plays a vital role in making children feel they are part of life in their society and culture, and have the ability and responsibility to contribute to it. However, what is the supposed role of education in creating this sense of agency and social responsibility?

In this presentation, I will argue that a sense of agency and social responsibility are central aspects of the human ability to create and influence life circumstances. This kind of creative agency can be cultivated in education and plays an important role in enabling a awareness of social practice and togetherness.

To help me explore the above question, I will draw on some recent insights from research into creativity and show what bearing these insights might have on education. I will in particular draw on recent research focused on the collective aspects of creativity and illustrate how these may affect our ideas of educating for creativity. Doing this, I will draw on a distinction between functional and value-based education for creativity. Having presented this, I will narrow down and illustrate what I mean by collective creativity and look at the apparent growth of a ‘we-paradigm’ in the field of creativity research.

Functional pedagogics or 'not for profit'?

The 21st century poses an entirely new set of challenges to most of us than just a decade ago. Focusing on work and education as some of the contexts in which these changes are felt, it is apparent that for most people the traditional path of working one's way up the career ladder within a large organisation belongs to the past. Today, many new jobs are created by small organisations and new businesses, which expect their employees to be adaptable and flexible, and to form self-directed, relational working teams. These rapid changes have emphasized the need for the employee to learn, to adapt, to interact, and to create new opportunities. And education is seen as a driver for facilitating the growth of these abilities. We are all, in some sense, on the edge of a new era of creativity, in which the ability to create together is deemed central.

As I see it, there are two ways of approaching pedagogical work to meet the challenges posed by requirements for creativity in the context of education. I call the first approach 'functional pedagogics' and the second 'not-for-profit pedagogics' (Tanggaard, 2016). Let us look at them in more detail.

1.4.1. The functional approach

There are various ways of understanding the role played by pedagogics and, more specifically, by schools and training courses in relation to the scenario I have been outlining. Currently, many educational reforms in Europe are intended to equip people with classical functional skills with a view to coping on the international market. The logic of this is that, to compete on this market, young people have to be as diligent in reading and maths as the workers in the global economies that are setting the agenda. So more time is being allocated to language and maths lessons.

There also seems to be a tendency to include creativity, entrepreneurship and innovation on the timetable of youth and adult education programmes. Here the dominant assumption is that one should inculcate in students the skills believed to be paramount for the development and implementation of new ideas and the growth of new companies (Mwasalwiba, 2010). In 'innovation and invention weeks' or at dedicated courses, students are thus encouraged to formulate, select and refine ideas, investigate their validity and the target market, and present prototypes and concepts to each other. Typically, students will work in project groups and will address specific social and/or organisational challenges. This approach, involving the direct coaching of such skills, is in some respects in line with the focus of reforms on achieving good functional skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Entrepreneurship and creative, innovative skills can be directly improved as specific skills that correspond more or less directly with what is required in practice.

One of the biggest mistakes with the functional logic in the educational creative industry as it currently stands is that we often equate creativity with exercises involving yellow post-it notes and various sorts of 'quick-fix' workshops. The idea that greater creativity can be accessed through simple techniques is, as Beghetto and Kaufman (2014, p. 56) note, "a result of a peculiarly American trust in gadgets and the injection of energy to speed things up" (Op.cit., p. 56). The simple truth, however, is that it takes time and exertion to develop

the creativity needed to solve a task or to become proficient with the components and concepts of a field. Creativity is not a skill that floats in space.

The problem is that many teachers do indeed want ready-made tools and techniques because they need something they can use the next day in a classroom. The good news for them is that such techniques exist. Who has not tried out an 'energiser' in a recent training course? Yet most of these techniques focus on developing divergent thinking, which constitutes at best only half the story of creativity. Furthermore, the majority of the tools are external, bearing little relation to the rest of the curriculum. Beghetto and Kaufman (2014, p. 52) quote a rather dry remark originally made by Baer and Garrett (2010): "It is hard to see how devising 100 different ways of using an egg box can help Johnny do well in the national maths' tests".

In functional pedagogics, there is a direct correspondence between the aimed-for skills that are central to creative projects in work and business and what takes place in schools and training courses. The contexts of school and training course must mirror practice as closely as possible. It is a matter of preparing students to enter or re-enter a labour market that demands certain specific skills. This position is directly opposed to a more market-critical and conservative view, such as my own.

I do not think of creativity as a special skill but rather as a general characteristic of the human being; nor do I think of it as a characteristic that can be 'instrumentalised'. At heart, the issue is one of equipping people to create, maintain and reconstruct the social in a fruitful way. When we create a social environment together, in which all experience is allowed to play a part, we call this democracy (Brinkmann, 2009). Education enables the general flourishing of the person and allows us to create the social. Let us look more closely at this position.

'Not for profit'

In his 2010 book *Not for Profit*, Nussbaum challenges the functionalistic logic that, she says, rules supreme in the educational systems of the west. Nussbaum defends the humanities at some length; her book is particularly interesting in its discussion of creativity and the role played by the education system and schools.

Nussbaum argues that the humanities, including practical musical subjects, are of major significance for the development and training of empathy in students. In these subjects, she says that students use and foster the ability to imagine the 'other'. This can happen, for example, when reading a work of fiction and identifying with a character, putting oneself in his or her shoes; or when studying a work of art, creating something new oneself, or imagining the artist's intentions or the aims of the work.

Our ability to imagine and our creativity are, according to Nussbaum, a requirement for the development of democracy, because they demand that we are able to put ourselves in the shoes of the 'other'. The main problem is that many of the humanities are perceived to have a low utility value. Instead, there is one-sided concentration on functional skills such as languages and maths. Such subjects allow, of course, for a certain type of imagination to be trained, but their current interpretation in the classroom is often linked to a focus on the measurable aspects of the field.

The question being asked in the conservative and critical camps is whether we have gone too far in instrumentalising activities in schools and the education system generally? Why do we find it hard to appreciate the value of the unprofitable? Why must everything be made into a means of achieving something else? Nussbaum is in this respect an advocate of the unprofitable, but she also makes the point that there is something profitable to be gleaned from the unprofitable. Without a perception of ourselves and others as actors in our lives and social affairs, it is impossible for us to share responsibility for and participate in the building of communities. Perhaps the humanities are more important than we currently realise?

If we follow Nussbaum's broad interpretation, creativity is a fundamental human capacity to imagine something that does not exist. Creativity helps to build communities, organisations and society on the expectation that tomorrow should be provided for. The creative capacity concerns the ability to imagine the perspective of another person and thus put oneself in their shoes. From the point of view of education, the creative capacity must be taught, and this requires the element of authority. The means is not a wild, uncontrollable process but one that is controlled and embraces the formation of a social community. The precondition – and the aim – of democracy is creativity. If people are not courageous enough for to be creative, then human communities are impossible. The point

here is that repetition can be creative; it does not restrain us. Imitation, routine, repetition and ritual have meaning for creativity because if we do not practise these things, then we will not be able to deviate from them.

If we were asked to put this in a nutshell, we would have to say that there are narrow and broad interpretations of the importance of creativity for us. The very simple answer to our introductory question about the necessity of creativity in creating a sense of agency and social responsibility, however, is that we cannot live without it. Either as individuals, as communities, organisations, institutions or society as it is. It is man's creative capacity that has allowed us to continually develop a better quality of life for ourselves and others. So it is still imperative that we discuss with each other how we should handle the aspects, whether wholesome or potentially destructive, of the power of the human being to imagine and to act. At the same time it is clear that there are many ideas about how to tackle this challenge in a pedagogical and educational context. As illustrated in what has gone before, these ideas are generally divided into the functional, and the more contextual, or value-based approaches.

The first approach, the functional one, is about the requirement to focus on creativity in school and training courses as a question of training the functions or skills currently in demand in society and business life, whether these are the Danish language, maths, or entrepreneurship; the value-based approach, like Nussbaum's position, anchors the belief in the necessity or inevitability of creativity in a more ontological understanding of what it means to be a human being. It is clear that education is by definition primarily framed by a functionalistic agenda (whereby the acquisition of certain skills and ability is the focal point, in preparation for the performance of specific tasks). Yet the educative aspects of this have occasion to refer to the humanistic position, since the apparently unprofitable may turn out to be the most profitable of all.

However, the main point here is that the value-based approach to understanding the role of creativity in education does lead us in the direction of a more collective understanding of creativity because a major condition for creativity seems to be the ability to imagine the other.

Moving towards the 'We-paradigm'

My colleague (Glăveanu, 2010) has suggested that creativity researchers move from the 'I' to the 'We' paradigm in education.

Glăveanu (2010) proposes that a demarcation is applied between three different paradigmatic stages featured in the study of creativity, which he labels the genius stage, the creative person stage and the 'social' stage or the 'He'-, 'I'- and 'We'-paradigms (Glăveanu, 2010, p. 148). The We-paradigm of creativity research illuminates the interdependence of individual lives and social situations in social practices, which suggest a system-oriented, distributed model of creativity focused on the interdependence of mind and culture. This means that creativity is extended out into an inter-personal space, resulting in a conceptual bridge between the inside and the outside, and therefore creativity can never be seen as a solely individual achievement (as it was in the 'I' – and the 'He' paradigm of creativity research before this shift occurred).

The above suggestion is why I would maintain that we need a new paradigm for creativity and innovation. In short, we should stop believing that it is a matter of individual thinking 'outside the box' and instead be aware of the fact that creativity and innovative opportunities exist at the 'edge of the box in the social realm'. Otherwise we risk falling into a romantic trap. Creativity is not just about having good ideas, but about working with them for long enough to ensure they mutate from being mere sketches to being well worked through, and thence become proposals with potential. It is the very definition of creativity as 'having good ideas' that puts creativity in the realm of the mysterious. The problem with this view is that creativity is not primarily about having good ideas but about being able to realise them together with others. Moreover, most studies suggest that even the creations of the recluse are realised as a collective endeavour (Glăveanu, 2014; Tanggaard, 2016). No one has ever created anything completely on their own. If someone has done so, it is because they have stood on others' shoulders. It is this position that can be used as a launchpad.

I would like to suggest that the first pitfall in organisations and, for that matter, in the education system and in educational settings is precisely the worn-out romantic and individualised understanding of how something new comes into the world. The individualised view prevents us from reaching a better understanding of creativity. Getting people to come up with a plethora of different, fun ideas or training them in instant creativity

are inadequate solutions. It is far more rewarding to look at the learning processes that are required to be creative. When engineers in the large industrial enterprise where I am currently carrying out a series of empirical investigations say that creativity requires them to be thoroughly familiar with the ins and outs of one's organisation; to truly understand the customer; to dare to take short cuts in procedures and documentation in order to get things done; to be courageous enough to say 'no' and take a different path without asking for permission; then we are being told that creativity in practice requires a lot of learning and, indeed, unlearning. Creativity is, in fact, a craft that one has to learn (Tanggaard & Juelsbo, 2015).

The greatest challenge for creativity in today's organisations is that there are far too many people with good ideas, but without sufficient knowledge of the practices on whose account they are formulating ideas. We have placed too much focus on individual talent, the 'recluse' and the exceptional rather than on working communities, the development of all employees' potential and the inventiveness of everyday work. This does not mean that we should not celebrate the achievements of individuals. We should, however, develop a clearer understanding of how those achievements come about. The romantic cultivation of the recluse in the knowledge society builds on far too narrow an understanding of reality. As Csikszentmihalyi says, creativity is *"no longer a luxury for the few, but a necessity for all"*. The global labour market values creative and relational skills to an increasing extent, and at the cost of narrower instrumental skills. Creativity is something for everyone, not just the gifted few. Furthermore, today's consensus in research circles is that creativity should be understood as a shared undertaking within social practices, cultivated by lifelong learning processes rather than as a mystical product of an inner world.

Creativity does not exist independently of the social world. It shows itself only when something is produced that is both new and meaningful. This is where the four P's feature in creativity research. Ideally, creative people, creative processes, creative products and creative pressure (from surroundings) should all be present before we can describe something as creative. This corresponds exactly to what Nobel prizewinners say about the foundation of their success being laid in their apprenticeship, as it were, to former Nobel

prize winners¹. All great breakthroughs are the result of the work of many people over time, and often of a sustained and persistent endeavour.

This is the issue that is most important with respect to education. A contemporary, more current concept of creativity and innovation does not have to be the antithesis to deep expertise, master skills, the art of small ideas, nor indeed to the ability to realise the ideas we have. A new, updated paradigm of creativity and innovation makes learning and collective achievements the central axis around which the novel idea is generated.

There is no shortage of *ideas*. But there may be a shortage of the will to work with ideas for the requisite time together with others and with the requisite concentration. This includes the capacity to say 'no' to other tasks that may arise. Most of the large organisations I work with are not short of ideas. They are in fact inundated with them. But they suffer from organisational bulimia. 'Novelty is overrated', is the title given to an article Charlotte Wegener and I have written. It became clear to us that the innovative organisations of the future will, more than ever, need to be focused and to recycle things². This is true on a societal level, just as it is true for our creative potential. It is when we reuse that we discover the new. It is when we work that we have new ideas.

We must therefore discard the paradigm of creativity that focuses on isolated insight and radical deviation and instead adopt a paradigm that emphasises the significance of learning, mastery, habit, routine and tradition. Creative thinking does not presuppose the absence of creative doing. We need intelligent actions and organisations that understand what really makes people more creative. New ideas are not the product of a vacuum, but emerge gradually and cumulatively. For this reason we must also settle the account that is forever pitting creativity against innovation, the generation of ideas against implementation, body against consciousness.

Education must respond to the new challenges relating to creativity and innovation by daring to highlight the importance of expertise in a field, mastery of a technique and re-use, taking the value-based understanding of education a step further. Here, creativity is not a secondary characteristic that is attained on festive occasions; rather it should be understood as a capacity to create that must be cultivated and restored through education. This must take place within subject areas. Creativity must not be thought of as a detached 'meta-competence' but as something that develops when a practitioner immerses him- or herself in, experiments with and encounters resistance from the material being worked with. Teachers must focus on the development of creativity in their students as a daily concern; fostering their courage to go deeper, to experiment, to ask oblique questions and to take new paths – with their subject. Creativity is not new. It inheres in all of us, and needs only to be discovered and cultivated.

Conclusion

In this presentation I have attempted to put forward a new understanding of creativity and innovation. I have tried to explain the false distinction between the generation of ideas and their implementation. The organisations of the future will not be short of ideas, but what they must do is carefully weigh up which ideas they will use and devote resources to. We should be far more interested in understanding what happens with the ideas and on the long, hard journey that must be taken to realise them. Hence, much more of creativity is 'business as usual' than many people realise. We must not only learn to operate a series of levers that make it possible for us to think creatively; we must also focus far more intently on mastering the craft in front of us, at succeeding in creating the new and in considering values: what will we pursue and why? Would we perhaps benefit from tidying up and reusing, rather than launching yet another new project? These will be the innovative questions of the future. We must reject the idea of instant creativity and turn towards an understanding of creativity that is at the edge of the box. Education should equip us to understand the box and know what kind of procedures allow us to stand at its edge. Creativity is a fundamental human capacity to imagine something that does not exist. Creativity helps to build communities, organisations and society on the expectation that tomorrow should be provided for. The creative capacity concerns the ability to imagine the perspective of another person and thus put oneself in their shoes. If people are not courageous enough for the creative, then human communities are impossible. The point here is that repetition can be creative; it does not

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