

The Role of the Arts in Education: Examining the Purposes of Creativity in Education

NOVEMBER 27, 2021 | ONLINE FROM TOKYO, JAPAN
The 6th Asian Undergraduate Research Symposium
A U R S 2 0 2 1

Chuying Wu | stnvcwu@ucl.ac.uk

Institute of Education, University College London



Introduction

- English National Curriculum Framework pictures a wish for an education that helps cultivate students' creativity (Department for Education, 2014); however, the description of *creativity* is implicit.
- Identifying the use of creativity that a curriculum adopts is vital since different uses might elicit radically different educational implications.
- Knowledge-rich curricula often view creativity as mere problem-solving, such as solving math problems. This notion of creativity is challenged since it may run the risk of restricting the purpose of education to raising productivity in the capitalistic society.
- Through reflecting on the purposes of creativity, this paper argues that the arts can confer a more transformative and active form of education than the mere presence of standardized knowledge.
- After analyzing Maxine Greene's and Kieran Egan's philosophical works, the paper suggests an alternative understanding to creativity, which calls for greater *social goods* and *personal sense-making*.

Creativity for Problem-Solving

- Philosophers like Briskman would agree that 'both artistic and scientific creativity are a matter of problem solving' (Gaut, 2010, p. 1038).
- Problem-solving is thought of as associated with the common conception of creativity — being both novel and useful, with the identification of new problems as novel and the suggestion of solutions as useful (Garrett, 1987).
- However, I would suggest that this way of equalizing problem-solving with creativity is reductive and tenuous.
- It is reductive in the sense that it might run the risk of restricting the use of creativity to a scientific manner, such as helping to solve math problems, within knowledge-rich curriculums.
- It is tenuous in the sense that it simply mapped out the superficial similarities between the two concepts — being new and helpful.

A Social Lens: Transformative

Creativity for Order Reconstruction

- Greene's (1995) writings mostly focus on the moral function of imagination in breaking down social prejudice. According to her, this could be achieved by enabling different groups of people to empathize for and understand the groups different from themselves.
- As Holm-Hadulla (2013) argues, 'creativity is often a dialectical process between construction and deconstruction, order and chaos' (p. 298). This argument is also one that Greene touched on a bit but not developed fully.
- Imagination, suggested by Greene (1995), allows other ways of looking at things, bringing new perspectives that might go against the stable norms. Those norms, I shall add, should be the ones that bring no benefits, the ones that limit one's potential, and the ones that might even cause chaos to society. Examples could be found in sexism, racism, ableism and other practices that attempt to demarcate different populations.

Art/Aesthetic Education for the "Transformative" Purpose

- Art allows the expression of the marginalized voices — voices that are silenced in our daily-life utterance. Art communicates in a way that 'supersede[s] class, race, and nation' (Nakamura, p. 29, 2019).

• Through collective participation in art experiences, students are allowed to interact not only with art mediums but also with peers from different backgrounds.

• When a plurality of people is presented to each other, engaging in a dialogue *about* others through the arts, a common consensus could be reached among the group (Greene, 1986). These acts both allow students to break the physical isolations and bridge connections.

A Personal Lens: Active

Creativity for Meaning-Making

- According to Egan (2010), knowledge accumulation alongside psychological development could only be seen as 'necessary conditions or constraints' in the process of education, with the efficient cause of education being the 'generative [and] meaning constructing capacity' that imagination may entail (p. 30).
- That is to say, the driving force for effective education is the capacity to imagine, instead of the emphasis on knowledge acquisition or cognitive development.
- Distinguishing between imagination and knowledge accumulation is important. This is because, oftentimes, people would consider passively receiving knowledge as a way to reach those "meanings" when people believe knowledge to be the truths.
- However, meaningful learning does not occur without active engagements with and the reorganization of those "meanings" – something that imagination might otherwise entail.

Art/Aesthetic Education for the "Active" Purpose

- Arts-rich curriculums are able to offer an active model of education that allows meaning-making through art experience.

• The aesthetic experience could never be imposed on a student (Greene, 1987). This is because, if a student wishes to create an artwork or give responses to one, he/she could only achieve that if they are willing and interested in doing so.

• According to Dewey, the arts is not just about creating artworks in a physical sense but also involves spiritual implications (Nakamura, 2019). That is to say, arts-rich curriculums may be more likely to help students actively reconstruct meanings through reorganizing art experiences with spiritual materials, such as memories and emotions.

Conclusion

- Via revising the purposes of creativity, this essay argues that arts may converse a more transformative and active form of education than knowledge does — one that argues against the reductive view of creativity for problem-solving.
- By critically analyzing Maxine Greene's and Kieran Egan's philosophical works, the paper suggests that arts-rich curriculums are more likely to put the newly proposed purposes of creativity into practice.
- On a social level, Greene's works envisage a more transformative use of creativity by showing its possibility in the reconstruction of social orders, such as breaking down social prejudice.
- On a personal level, Egan's works calls for active meaning-making from imagination but not passive reception of knowledge.

References

- Department for Education, 2014. *National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4*. [online] GOV.UK. Available at: <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>> [Accessed 4 May 2021].
- Egan, K., 2010. Culture, imagination, and the development of the mind. In: T. Nielsen and R. Fitzgerald, ed., *Imagination in educational theory and practice: A many-sided vision*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp.21-41.
- Garrett, R., 1987. Issues in science education: problem-solving, creativity and originality. *International Journal of Science Education*, 9(2), pp.125-137.
- Gaut, B., 2010. The Philosophy of Creativity. *Philosophy Compass*, 5(12), pp.1034-1046.
- Greene, M., 1986. The Spaces of Aesthetic Education. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 20(4), pp.56-62.
- Greene, M., 1987. Creating, Experiencing, Sense-Making: Art Worlds in Schools. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 21(4), pp.11-23.
- Greene, M., 1995. Imagination, Community and the School. In: *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp.32-43.
- Holm-Hadulla, R., 2013. The Dialectic of Creativity: A Synthesis of Neurobiological, Psychological, Cultural and Practical Aspects of the Creative Process. *Creativity Research Journal*, 25(3), pp.293-299.
- Nakamura, K., 2019. A Progressive Vision of Democratizing Art: Dewey's and Barnes's Experiments in Art Education in the 1920s. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 53(1), pp.25-42.