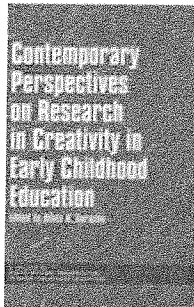


Forming Support Networks for Creativity: Starting With Early Childhood Education

A review of



Contemporary Perspectives on Research in Creativity in Early Childhood Education

by Olivia N. Saracho (Ed.)

Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012. 426 pp. ISBN 978-1-61735-741-1
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“It was a scary night . . .” began my four-year-old niece under the “fort” with a flashlight beaming light across her face. She proceeded to tell a story in which a monster “eated” children. Her mother informed me that this is what she and her grandmother did recently—they built “forts” and told “scary” stories. Later that night when we were around the campfire, my niece directed each person to add to the story that she started the same way (using the gestures, voice, and words used by her day-care teacher to do the same thing in class). This example illustrates two key questions posed by the book *Contemporary Perspectives on Research in Creativity in Early Childhood Education*: How are young children creative (i.e., is it creative if they do what their teachers did?), and how can early childhood teachers develop creativity in their students?

Authors of the 19 chapters in this book discuss definitions of *creativity*, review the literature regarding specific topics (topics include theoretical perspectives, young children's creative process, play, movement, art, and science), and consider the implications for teachers. This compilation includes a variety of perspectives and backgrounds, including those of prominent creativity and education researchers and educators. Although the book is intended as a "reference for early childhood education researchers, scholars, academics, general educators, teacher educators, teachers, graduate students, and scientists" (p. 7), the book will likely most appeal to and benefit those seeking research ideas or brief literature reviews and early childhood teachers seeking a theoretical and empirical understanding of creativity and teaching creativity.

The chapters are grouped into seven sections: the Introduction, Theoretical Foundations of Creativity (three chapters covering Runco's personal creativity theory, Baer on domain specificity, and Vygotsky's theory of creativity), Children's Creative Processes (three chapters), Children's Artistic and Creative Experiences (four chapters), Play and Creativity (three chapters), Implications for Teaching (four chapters), and the Conclusion. Although there is some overlap across sections and repetition across chapters (e.g., authors define *creativity* similarly), each chapter offers at least one unique idea. The book is noteworthy in its breadth of coverage and its theoretical foundations. It is especially important for its contributions to discussions regarding creativity in young children.

Creativity Has "Gone Viral"

Multiple authors in the current volume note that creativity in young children has been a hot topic in recent years. This attention in education has been sparked by the consequences of the No Child Left Behind goals. McArdle and Grieshaber (as well as several other chapter authors) discuss the concern about a decline in creativity in children, especially due to the present focus on increasing academic skills via the "rubricification of education" (p. 143).

Research supports this concern. For example, Kim (2011) found that performance on the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking declined in samples of children assessed in 1990, 1998, and 2008, with the decline most pronounced in young children. Yet, Russ and Dillon (2011) found an increase in imagination scores in samples of children studied between 1985 through 2008. This study was reported in a recent *Monitor on Psychology* article, and its authors are quoted as suggesting that the increase could be because children take advantage of the opportunity to be imaginative since they may have fewer opportunities to engage in play (Miller, 2012, p. 12).

Several chapter authors suggest that children are engaging in less free play, which results in less creativity in young children. Research consistently shows that creativity requires practice and training (see Sawyer, 2012, for an overview of the psychology of

creativity literature). If young children are not experiencing the practice they need to develop their creativity, such as via play, then it should be expected that creativity will decline. Several authors in this volume note that although teachers agree that creativity is important, teachers often find teaching creativity difficult to implement in the classroom, given the curricula expectations to emphasize academic content. Blake and Giannangelo (as do others) argue that conceptions of creativity and creative teaching also influence teachers' efforts because "some people associate creative teaching with a lack of discipline in education" (p. 305).

How Is Creativity Defined for Young Children?

Plucker, Beghetto, and Dow (2004) defined *creativity* as "the interaction among *aptitude*, *process* and *environment* by which an individual or group produces a *perceptible product* that is both *novel and useful* as defined within a *social context*" (p. 90). This definition was based on their review of the definitions commonly used by creativity researchers. Sawyer (2012) suggested that two perspectives can be taken regarding defining creativity: (a) an individualist approach ("new mental combination that is expressed"; p. 7) and (b) a sociocultural approach (judged "novel" and "appropriate" by "a suitably knowledgeable social group"; p. 8). Both of Sawyer's definitions require some expression or product.

Although creativity researchers typically incorporate elements of these definitions into their own work, the chapter authors emphasize that these definitions do not readily apply for creativity in young children because (a) they do not always express novel ways of thinking via their work and (b) their work is certainly not considered new by any group because they do not produce work with any level of expertise at this age. Instead, authors emphasize a focus on process rather than product in their consideration of creativity in young children.

Several authors discuss Kaufman and Beghetto's (2009) Four C model of creativity (see Beghetto and colleagues' chapter in the current volume for their perspective on the model's implications for young children). Authors also discuss imagination and different types of creativity for young children, in addition to divergent and convergent thinking (see Adams and Chen's chapter for examples such as "exploring and experimenting" and "making").

Authors in the current volume emphasize that young children are naturally creative and/or have creative potential, consistent with a common conception of creativity as naturally evident in young children until they are taught otherwise (e.g., Sawyer, 2012). However, Mumford, Mecca, Gibson, and Giorgini emphasize the role of knowledge or expertise in creativity, something that young children typically do not possess (p. 320). Multiple chapter authors do note that teachers often conceptualize creativity in ways that do not actually reflect creativity (e.g., conventional) or perceive creativity to be negative (e.g.,

disruptive) and that these conceptions negatively influence how they respond to creative children in the classroom (e.g., see Jalongo and Hirsh's chapter). Authors note that not only can creativity be taught to young children, it needs to be taught because creativity is a skill to be developed like other academic skills.

Limitations

As with any edited volume, some chapters are stronger than others. I was expecting a critical examination of the research that would include its strengths and weaknesses per the description of the book on the back cover. Although authors do critically consider the application of theories and research in creativity to young children, some of the chapters focus on a discussion of ideas or studies, without clear indication of the quality or limitations of research on which the ideas are based (in some cases, ideas are presented with little elaboration, support, or examples, or they appear to be supported with handbook or encyclopedia references rather than empirical references).

For example, three chapters emphasize the role of play in developing creativity. Although the authors cite studies to support their assertions, none of the authors considers the limitations of the research (Lillard et al., 2013, reviewed the literature regarding play and creativity and discussed limitations in the methodologies that made drawing conclusions difficult). Finally, there are instances of grammatical and typing errors, missing punctuation, incomplete citations and references, and unclear writing that make reading difficult at times.

Conclusion

I was especially excited to read this book because of its timing: Five of our nieces and grandnieces and our grandson are at this age; I coedited a book (Gregerson, Snyder, & Kaufman, 2013) on practical considerations for teaching creatively and teaching creativity across the educational life span that was recently published; and there is increasing attention directed to the role of teachers and schools in promoting creativity development, as noted above. Readers with a variety of goals, whether research or practice, will find something worthwhile in this volume.

The authors carefully consider what creativity looks like in young children and how teachers can enhance it. As the editor, Saracho, notes in one of her chapters, "When society appreciates creative thinking and expression, it merges into its social consciousness and social capital. Then society guards its source of creativity by forming support networks" (pp. 128–129). This book captures current societal perspectives and discusses children's first teachers as support networks for creativity.

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