



Norwegian parents' perspective on environmental factors that influence creativity – An empirical grounding for future studies

Marte S. Gulliksen

Department of Visual and Performing Arts Education, Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Sciences, University College of Southeast-Norway, Postbox 155, N-3672, Notodden, Norway



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Creativity
Education
Environment
Culture
Semi-structured interviews

ABSTRACT

This article discuss environmental influence on children's creativity through the perspective of Norwegian parents. Semi-structured parent interviews was collected to explore how they define creativity and construct their children's environment. Results show that parents emphasise time and opportunity to free-play, as they see creativity ideally to be a self-initiated activity. Informants linked creativity to both internal (individual) and external (sociocultural) activities. Parents saw both activities as valuable, yet they tended to favour internal expression when constructing their children's environment for creativity. Parents' perceptions influence how children experience and interpret learning activities. Therefore, this knowledge on parents' perspective is useful in future educational research on teaching for creativity. Further, this knowledge contribute to the knowledge base on creativity, culture and education.

1. Introduction

Original ideas that generate effective and functional solutions to environmental, technological or societal problems are regarded to be crucial for the further development of post-industrial societies (Davies et al., 2014; Davis, 1997; Eteläpelto & Lahti, 2008; Bramwell, Kronish, Lilly, & Reilly, 2011). Such ideas are often referred to as being creative, or as being the result of creative processes of one or more creative persons. The educational system is the place where students are expected to develop creativity (Davies et al., 2014), whether regarded as a central 21st century skill (Bellanca & Brandt, 2010; EU, 2006; Trilling & Fadel, 2009), a core human competency (Reilly et al., 2011; Simonton, 2003) or a part of the broader concept of human capital (Gulliksen & Hondzel, 2015; Schultz, 1961).

Research on 'teaching for creativity' has shown that the definitions of and attitudes on creativity of the persons in the learning environment is a central factor for developing a learning environment that nurture creativity (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Davies et al., 2014; NACCCE, 1999; Reilly et al., 2011). This learning environment is constructed not only by the physical environment, but – more importantly – by the teachers and the pupils, their peers and their parents, all of whom are enclosed in a community of knowledge, an organisation and other cultural and social relations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; NRC, 2000; Sawyer, 2014; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2014; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

This article focus on parents' role in establishing and maintaining an environment for creativity for their children. The research presented in this article is conducted within the context of the international Human Ingenuity Research Group (HIRG), hosted by Western University in Canada (Dishke Hondzel & Gulliksen, 2012; Dishke Hondzel, Hansen, Gulliksen, & Lindfors, 2014; Western, 2013). This group studies and compares creativity, culture and education in relatively similar cultures: Canada, Norway and Finland. New research evidence from HIRG documented that the community size where children lives co-variate with their scores on a

E-mail address: marte.gulliksen@usn.no.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2018.01.013>

Received 27 November 2017; Received in revised form 12 January 2018; Accepted 27 January 2018

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measure of divergent thinking (Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, TTCT) (Gulliksen & Hondzel, 2015). Analysing 256 eight-year-old children in Norway and Canada, they found significant differences on three sub-scales of TTCT related to community size: Canadian children in rural areas scored higher than children in urban areas, while Norwegian children in urban areas scored higher than children in rural areas. This present article follows up this between-country reversed relationship by generating more data on the environments where the Norwegian children came from. Another article will later present similar data from Canada, and a third will compare the two countries.

1.1. Aim and research question

This article presents a first exploration of possible environmental factors that may influence creativity of eight-year-old children in Norway. As an eight-year-old child's environment is tightly knit to their parents, the parent can be expected to know how their child spend their time and what they prefer to do, the approach is through interviewing parents.

The research question is: *How do Norwegian parents describe the practical, physical and psychosocial environment for creativity in which their eight-year-old children grow up?*

The primary objective for doing this is to document a sample of Norwegian parents' perspective on creativity, and explore how they act upon it to foster creativity in their children. This knowledge is relevant for teachers, because it presents information on parents' prior beliefs and expectations of creativity, and what is done and what is learned in an educational situation. The article prepare the ground for later studies discussing challenges teachers might face when teaching for creativity, and the impact of pupil's and parent's expectations and prior beliefs on educational outcome (Gulliksen & Hjordemaal, 2016; Kahneman, 2002; Shulman, 1986). The results from this study will form both an empirical ground for, and indicate tentative hypotheses for, later and more extensive, targeted studies researching the link between culture, creativity and education, as well as future educational research on teaching for creativity.

2. Theory

2.1. Creativity – as approached in this study

The discussion on what creativity is and thus how it is developed, is many faceted and sometimes contradictory (Klausen, 2010; Reilly et al., 2011; Sternberg, 1999, 2006). It can be referred to as something to do with the arts (“the creative subjects”) or with science and technology (“innovation”); as ideas that can just appear, or result from many years of effort. It is used about the playfulness of children, or be represented only in the highest form of human genius' accomplishment. Creativity can be a positive force or have a dark side, and it can be a skill that every human has, or something reserved to the very few. This list of possible uses of the term creativity is derived from Beghetto (2013), and he succinctly comments: “when a concept is used without being defined, it can be used to mean just about anything” (Beghetto, 2013). This, he emphasises, applies both to laymen's everyday use of the term, as well as between scholars.

In this article, *creativity* is defined as referring to something which is both *innovative and functional*, a trait that can be recognised in or carried by a product or a process and that is held, developed, experienced and expressed by a person or persons *in a socially and culturally specific context*. This is a common definition applied by scholars in their research on creativity (Colman, 2008; Klausen, 2010; Plucker et al., 2004; Beghetto, Dow, & Plucker, 2004). This broad definition of creativity is applied to encourage an interdisciplinary theoretical foundation drawing on several fields of inquiry. However, this broad definition does not take into account other aspects of creativity, like the level of creative contribution (e.g. the 4-C-model of creativity of Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) or who are the bearers of the creativity (Klausen, 2010).

For something to be recognised as creative, it must contribute something new and desirable to others, and therefore it in one way or another be valued in a cultural setting. Rudowicz writes, “creativity understood as a mental process cannot be isolated from the socio-cultural system in which the individual functions” (Rudowicz, 2003). The cultural environment thus influence the development of creativity (KEA E.A., 2009; Klausen, 2010) and frames what is possible to do or make (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Gombrich, 1993; Gulliksen, 2006). Therefore, the person aiming to give a creative contribution, needs to learn the symbolic codes of a culture in order to succeed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

The research of HIRG draw upon Glävenau's definition of innovation: “a complex socio-cultural-psychological process that, through working with ‘culturally- impregnated’ materials within an intersubjective space, leads to the generation of artefacts that are evaluated as new and significant by one or more persons or communities at a given time” (Gläveanu, 2010). HIRG applies a broad definition of creativity, understood as something which is innovative, original and appropriate to the situation, and functional in the sense that it leads to novel and efficient solutions to existing problems. It is further conceptualised in three dimensions: as individual processes (P-creativity), social processes in the society (H-creativity) and cultural processes (C-creativity). While much research has been conducted on both P-creativity and H-creativity, C-creativity is still developing from the available knowledge (Gläveanu, 2010; Gulliksen & Hondzel, 2015). The systems perspective on creativity offered by Csikszentmihalyi is thus a relevant perspective to this study (1999). He writes: “the occurrence of creativity is not simply a function of how many gifted individuals there are, but also of how accessible the various symbolic systems are and how responsive the social system is to novel ideas [...], it will make more sense to focus on communities that may or may not nurture genius” (1999, p. 333). This present study is looking at 8-year olds' creativity, and is thus looking on lower levels of creative contribution than that of the genius. Still, it is nevertheless important to look to the local community and see how they make symbolic cultural systems available, with which attitudes and perspectives the parents and

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